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Installation of Electricity Poles in and Adjacent to Wroxeter Hotel, Shropshire: an Archaeological Watching Brief

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1.0 Summary

The construction of an extension to the Wroxeter Hotel, Wroxeter, Shropshire (at NGR SJ 5634 0835) necessitated the provision of an increased electricity supply via a new overhead electricity cable. A total of five pole-holes was excavated: four in the grounds of the hotel and a fifth that was excavated in an adjacent field to the north. This work was undertaken by GPU Power Engineering UK, on behalf of npower under the archaeological supervision of BUFAU. With the exception of Pole-hole 3, little significant stratified archaeological evidence was located, although some Roman period finds were recovered. Trench 3, adjacent to the street frontage of the hotel's garden, located the foundation for the wall of a building probably founded in the 2nd century. This was situated at the northern end of the eastern frontage of insula XXVII and is paralleled by earlier geophysical and archaeological evidence for other buildings further to the south and along the same frontage.

2.0 Introduction

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken during excavations for the erection of wooden poles in land belonging to, and adjacent to, the Wroxeter Hotel, Wroxeter, Shropshire (NGR SJ 5634 0835; Figs. 1 & 2). Enlargement of the facilities at the hotel necessitated an additional supply of electricity, taken from an existing power line to the north. A line of wooden poles was required to carry an overhead electricity cable, from the power source to the hotel. The project involved the excavation of four deep pole-holes in the hotel's front garden, plus a fifth hole in an adjacent field to the north (Fig. 3). The groundworks were carried out by GPU Power Engineering UK, on behalf of npower.

Wroxeter Hotel, its grounds, and the immediate surrounds lie within the boundary of Wroxeter Roman City, a Scheduled Ancient Monument (County Monument No. 32). An archaeological watching brief, during groundworks, was therefore stipulated as a condition for the granting of the planning application for the poles' installation. GPU Engineering contracted Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) to carry out the watching brief and a qualified archaeologist attended the site on February 21st, 22nd and 23rd, when the work was undertaken.

3.0 Site Location and History

The Wroxeter Hotel is situated in the village of Wroxeter, Shropshire, which lies on the east bank of the River Severn, some 5 miles (8km) south-cast of the centre of Shrewsbury (Figs.1 & 2). The hotel and its surrounds are located within the site of Wroxeter Roman City, a Scheduled Ancient Monument (County Monument No. 32).

A desk-based assessment of the hotel and its land was undertaken in 1991 (Buteux and Leach 1992) in order to examine the history of previous groundworks in the locale. The evaluation highlighted significant archaeological discoveries that had been made nearby. In 2001, Dr. Roger White carried out an archaeological watching brief during groundworks for an extension to the hotel (White 2001). The resultant project report concluded that there was little evidence for substantial occupation of that parcel of land during the Roman period and none for the Medieval period.

4.0 Methodology

The locations of the excavations were surveyed-in and marked by the contractors, in advance of the groundworks. The five, rectangular-shaped pole-holes were dug by hand. Each hole was typically 0.6m-wide by 1.5m-long by 1.4m-deep, although the base was stepped, to ease positioning of the poles.

Any *in situ* archaeology exposed by the groundworks was hand-cleaned, then detailed on pre-printed *pro-forma* record cards for features and contexts. For ease of recording, the excavations were designated PH1 (i.e. Pole Hole 1) through to PH5 and feature/context numbers were allocated accordingly. The written records were supplemented by section drawings and plans (1:20 scale or 1:200 scale, as appropriate), and monochrome/colour-print photography. Where archaeological features were absent, stratigraphic sequences of the soil layers were recorded. All artefacts, recovered from individual contexts or spoilheaps were placed in suitablylabelled bags and transported to the BUFAU Finds Room at Birmingham University, where they were cleaned, identified and catalogued. The records and finds form part of the site archive, at present held by BUFAU.

5.0 Results

Pole-Hole 1 (PH1; Fig. 2)

The first pole-hole (PH1) was excavated in the front lawn of the Wroxeter Hotel, close to the southern border of the grassed area and a short distance from the hotel buildings. Spoil from the excavation was checked for artefacts as it was being generated, a procedure repeated for every hole. Once the groundwork had been completed, the sides of the hole were hand-cleaned and inspected.

The base of the excavation cut into a fine, silty-sand deposit (1001), pale brown in colour, that lay directly beneath a deep layer of dark-brown, sandy-silt topsoil (1000). Scattered throughout the topsoil were fragments of modern building debris (brick/tile/ mortar), which were not collected. However, the topsoil also yielded sherds of pottery and animal bone fragments that were recovered for future reference.

Layer 1001 was cut by a feature (F100), which was visible in both the east-facing and west-facing sections of the pole-hole. The full profile of the feature was not discernible, as the current excavation was of insufficient width and depth to fully-expose its cross-section. On the limited evidence available, feature F100 appeared to be a deep, wide ditch, aligned east-west. Only one infill was apparent, a brown, sandy-silt deposit (1002), which yielded pottery sherds and fragments of animal bones.

Feature F100 was truncated by a symmetrical, U-shaped cut (F101) that had the appearance of a narrow ditch or gully. Feature F101 was also aligned east-west and contained one infill (1003), a dark-brown, sandy-silt deposit. The infill yielded a few sherds of pottery and some fragments of animal bone. However, it was root-disturbed

and very similar to the overlying topsoil layer (1000). Feature F101 was therefore likely to be relatively modern and may be associated with soil drainage.

Pole-Hole 2 (PH2; Fig. 2)

The second pole-hole (PH2) was excavated in the hotel lawn, some 36m to the north of PH1. In common with the other groundworks, the location of the hole was originally surveyed-in by the contractors and then, after excavation, by BUFAU (whose results were in agreement). When plotting its position on a large-scale map of the area, the latter indicated that the hole should lie a number of metres away from the hedge line separating the hotel grounds from those of the adjacent Old Post Office building. However, in reality the excavation was close to the hedge, illustrating that the mapped alignment of the boundary line was incorrect at that point.

The base of PH2 cut into a natural deposit of mixed sand and gravels (2002), whose colour varied from pink, through red, to orange. Overlying the sand-gravels was a 0.3m-thick layer (2001) of fine sand admixed with silt, possessing a pale, yellow-brown colour. A deep layer of topsoil (2000) rested on deposit 2001. It was indistinguishable from the topsoil seen in the first post-hole (i.e. 1000) and also yielded similar artefacts.

A V-shaped feature (F200), cutting layers 2001 and 2002, was clearly visible in the west-facing, north-facing and east-facing sections of PH2. The profile of the cut suggested that feature F200 was a ditch, possibly aligned north-south. There were two deposits within the feature, 2003 and 2004. The lower deposit (2004) constituted most of the infill. It comprised a clayey, sandy silt, with particles of pulverised, red sandstone and occasional charcoal flecks scattered throughout the matrix. During the excavation and hand-cleaning, several fragments of animal bone were recovered from this deposit.

The second infill within feature F200 consisted of grey-brown, sandy silt. It contained a sparse scatter of charcoal flecks and yielded a small number of pottery sherds, some fragments of animal bone, and fragments of fired-clay tile/brick.

Pole-Hole 3 (PH3; Fig. 2)

The third pole-hole (PH3) was excavated at the northern extremity of the hotel lawn, close to the public highway and the entrance to the hotel's access road. The base of the rectangular-shaped hole cut into a natural deposit of greenish-yellow sandstone (3001), that was overlain by a 0.4m-deep layer of clayey, sandy silt (3005). Deposit 3005 was pale, grey-yellow in colour and possessed a few charcoal flecks within its matrix. It yielded several fragments of animal bone and fired-clay tile/brick during the excavation.

Overlying, or cutting into, layer 3005 were the remnants of wall foundations (F300). These took the form of an intermittent, single layer of red sandstone blocks plus occasional river pebbles, bonded together by a yellowish-brown mortar (3004). Abutting the stones was a heterogeneous deposit (3003) of red sand-gravels admixed with brown silt, from which were recovered fragments of animal bone and fired-clay tile/brick.

The wall foundations and deposit 3003 were both sealed beneath a 0.6m-deep layer of grey-brown, sandy silt (3001), over which lay the topsoil (3000). Within silty deposit 3001 were fragments of modern bricks and tiles (not recovered), suggesting that it was a make-up layer, introduced to raise the level of the hotel garden at that location. The topsoil (3000) was of similar appearance to that noted in the other two pole-holes and yielded sherds of pottery, plus fragments of animal bone, during excavation.

Pole-Hole 4 (PII4; Fig. 2)

A fourth hole (PH4) was excavated in a field to the north of Wroxeter Hotel, close to a wooden pole carrying the existing overhead power-line. The base of the hole cut into a yellowish-brown deposit, comprising a fine sand-silt admixture (4001), similar in appearance to contexts 1001 (in PH1) and 2001 (in PH2). A deep layer of topsoil (4000) overlay deposit 4001 and yielded sherds of pottery, fragments of animal bones, corroded iron objects, and fragments of fired-clay tile/brick.

Cutting into layer 4001, in the north-facing and east-facing sections of the pole-hole, was a U-shaped feature (F401). Unfortunately, only the lower extremity of the cut had survived, the majority of the feature having been obliterated by a larger, later cut (F400). What little remained of feature F401 was filled with a single deposit (4003), which comprised a heterogeneous mix of (river) gravels and grey silt. During hand-cleaning, prior to recording, numerous fragments of animal bone were recovered from this deposit and a small number of pottery sherds.

Feature F400, a large, flat-based cut, was approximately 0.4m in depth and had the appearance of a pit, although its full profile was not exposed in section. It contained one infill (4002), comprising a heterogeneous mix of red sand-gravel and grey-brown silty soil. Scattered throughout the deposit were occasional charcoal flecks and fragments of building debris (Post-Medieval brick and tile), suggesting that the feature was relatively modern.

Pole-Hole 5 (PH5; Fig. 2)

The final excavation (PH5) was sited in the hotel grounds, in a planted, garden border a short distance to the south of pole-hole PH1. Its purpose was to house a support/brace-line for the wooden pole located in PH1. The deepest subsoil layer exposed by the excavation comprised a deposit of grey-yellow, fine sand (5002), equivalent to context 1001 in PH1. Layer 5002 had been cut by a wide feature (F500), whose full profile could not be seen in section. The feature was filled with a brown, sandy-silt (5001), which yielded numerous fragments of animal bone, several sherds of pottery and one small lump of slag. A layer of brown-black, silty topsoil (5000) overlay the infill of feature F500.

6.0 The Finds

The Roman Pottery (by Jane Evans).

Excavation of the pole holes at the Wroxeter Hotel produced a total of 89 sherds of Romano-British pottery, weighing 2083g. The proportions of amphorae, samian, mortaria and coarse wares within this are consistent with other Wroxeter assemblages (Evans forthcoming fig. 5.16). The pottery ranged in date from the 1st century through to the late 4th century. Residual pottery was included, so contexts allocated a late TPQ usually also contained a range of earlier material. This is typical of Wroxeter

assemblages, owing to the long period of intense activity. The pottery was fragmentary but favourable soil conditions meant that surfaces were generally well preserved. Pole-hole PH4 produced 3 substantial fragments of amphorae, hinting at well-preserved archaeology in the vicinity. The findings from each excavation are summarised below. None of the pottery is illustrated, but parallels in the Wroxeter Baths and Macellum assemblage are provided.

Pole	Contex	TPQ/
Hole	t	Spot date
PH 1	1000	Late C3rd+
	1002	Late C4th+
	1003	Late C3rd+
PH 2	2000	120 AD+
	2003	Mid-Late C2nd+
PH 3	3000	Late C1st/C2nd
PH 4	4000	C2nd+
	_4003	Late C2nd/Early C3rd+
PH 5	5001	Late C3rd+

Table 1: Spot dating of the assemblage

Table 2: Quantification of the pottery recovered

Site Co WHE 0	ode: 2			Fabric G (Sherd c	roup ount)					Total count: Roman
Pole- Hole	Context	Sam.	Mort	Amph.	Reduced	Oxidised	White	Hand.	BB1	
PH 1	1000 (Topsoil) 1002 (F100) 1003 (F101)	3	1		1 6	6 7 (1wcc, 2 mica d) 5 (1wcc)		1calc	32	13 17 8
PH 2	2000 (Topsoil) 2003 (F200)	3		1	2	5 (1wcc) 5	1		2	8 11
PH 3	3000 (Topsoil)	1	1						<u> </u>	2
PH4	4000 (Topsoil) 4003 (F401)	3		3	1	12(1wcc) 2			1	19 4
PH 5	5001 (F500)		1		1	5 (1wcc, 1nvcc, 1oxf cc)				7
Total count (% Total)		11 (12.5)	3 (3)	4 (4.5)	Coarse wares = 71 (80)			89		
Total weight (% Total)		106g (5)	230g (11)	1046g (50)	Coarse wares = 701g (34)		2083g			
Total Rim EVE 22 (% Total) (1		27 (19)	22 (15)	13 (9)	Coarse wa	res = 81 (56)				143

Key

BB1 = Black Burnished ware; wcc = white colour coat; calc = late Roman handmade shelly ware; mica d = mica dusted; nvcc = Nene Valley colour coat; oxf cc = Oxfordshire colour coat

Pole Hole PH 1

This excavation produced the largest group of pottery and included a number of diagnostically late types. These comprised Black-burnished ware (BB1) jars with obtuse cross hatch and splayed rims (Evans 2000, fig.4.55, JC3.8), common from the late 3rd century on, and a BB1 conical bowl with a flanged rim (*op. cit.* fig. 4.69, B24). The base from a shelly ware jar was also noted. The latter ware was not widely distributed in this region until the later 4th century and is common in the latest phases at Wroxeter (Symonds 1997, figs. 366 and 372).

A number of residual 1st and 2nd century types was also present. These included the rim from a 1st century, La Graufesenque South Gaulish Dressel 27 cup; body sherds from late-1st to early-2nd century mica-dusted ware (*op. cit.* fabric MICA2, 268) and

sherds from a rusticated jar (*op. cit.* fig. 4.57, JM1). Second century forms included a BB1 bowl (*op. cit.* fig. 4.68, B20) and a ring necked flagon (*op. cit.* fig. 4.50, F4.6).

Pole Hole PH 2

The pottery recovered from the topsoil (2000) of pole-hole PH 2 and from the infill (2003) of feature F200, all dated to the 2nd century. The dating was provided by two sherds of samian, from Dressel (Dr) 35 and Dr 33 cups, and two sherds of BB1, the latter indicating a TPQ of c 120 AD.

Pole Hole PH 3

The topsoil layer (3000) in pole-hole PH 3 yielded 2 sherds of pottery. One was from a locally produced mortarium (*op. cit.* M5.62, fig. 4.72, Fabric MWWOC) and the second sherd was of South Gaulish La Graufesenque samian.

Pole Hole PH 4

Topsoil (4000) from pole-hole PH 4 yielded a number of pottery sherds, including 3 substantial fragments of Dressel 20 amphorae, of a broadly late-1st to 2nd century type. The surface layer (4000) also produced sherds of samian, including a Dr 33 cup dating to the mid-late 2nd century, and a 2nd-to-3rd century Severn Valley ware jar (Webster 1976, A6). The latter was over-fired and appeared to be a second or waster, attesting to pottery production in the vicinity during this period.

Pole Hole PH 5

The infill (5001) of feature F500 yielded a number of sherds, including one from an Oxfordshire colour-coated ware bowl (*op. cit.* fig. 4.65, B7.31). This ware tends to be associated with the latest phases at Wroxeter, indicating a late 3rd to 4th-century TPQ, similar to that for excavation PH 1. Another interesting find was the rim-sherd from a mortarium, stamped with what appears to be the name DOCCAS. This is a potter known to have worked at Mancetter Hartshill, but a similar vessel from the Wroxeter baths and Macellum site was thought to be a local product (*op. cit.* fig. 4.75 M11.32, Fabric MOCRA).

Post-Roman Pottery

In pole-hole PH 1, topsoil layer 1000 yielded an abraded sherd of pottery that was possibly of Medieval date, whilst one sherd recovered from infill 1002 (feature F100) appeared to be Post-Medieval. Topsoil 2000, from excavation PH 2, yielded 15 sherds of Post-Medieval pottery. Infill 2003, within feature F200, contained one sherd of Post-Medieval pottery, possibly introduced into the deposit by animal action. One sherd of Post-Medieval pottery was recovered from topsoil layer 3000 in pole-hole PH 3, whilst topsoil 4000 (excavation PH4) yielded 5 sherds of Post-Medieval pottery.

Ceramic building material

Brick

Two fragments of fired-clay brick were recovered from context 2003, a deposit infilling the cut of feature F200.

Tile

Topsoil layer 1000, from excavation PH1, yielded 12 fragments of fired-clay tile, whilst six fragments were found within the deposit (1002) infilling feature F100. In pole-hole PH2, the topsoil (2000) contained 12 fragments of tile of varying sizes, but none was recovered from the equivalent layer (3000) in excavation PH3. However, deposit 3003, abutting wall foundations F300, yielded three fragments of tile and two more were recovered from layer 3005 (underlying F300). The topsoil from pole-hole PH4 yielded a relatively large amount of tile, some 29 fragments in total, all of a coarse texture. Deposit 4003, infilling the cut of feature F401, yielded a single piece of tile.

Much of the fired-clay tile was too fragmentary to give an indication of their original dimensions. However, the limited number of pieces that were of use suggested that the tiles varied in thickness from 15 to 30 mm.

Fired Clay

A small lump of fired clay was recovered from deposit 1002, which infilled the cut of feature F100.

Iron Items

A heavily-corroded iron nail was recovered from topsoil 1000 (in PH1) and the equivalent layer (4000) in excavation PH4 yielded a number of corroded items. Only those that were clearly recognisable as nails could be positively identified.

A small, heavily-corroded piece of iron was found in deposit 2003, infilling feature F200. It tapered towards one end, but was too badly rusted for its original purpose to be identified.

Glass Find

One sherd of thin-walled, sheet glass was recovered from topsoil 4000 in PH4. It had a greenish hue and was highly transparent, but did contain a few minute air bubbles. It probably dates to the Roman period but is otherwise undiagnostic.

Non-Metallic Slag

A dark-coloured lump of semi-vitreous slag was recovered from deposit 5001, which infilled the cut of feature F500 (excavation PH5).

Animal Bones

Topsoil 1000, from excavation PH1, yielded 56 bone fragments. Included within these were three pieces of jawbone (from at least two different animals), three separate teeth (two types) and two limb-bones that bore butchery marks. From within the same excavation, deposit 1002 (F100) yielded 32 bone fragments - including 6 teeth (three different types) - and 12 fragments of bone were recovered from deposit 1003 (F101). The latter included part of a tooth and one of the bone fragments had undergone a heat regime of sufficient intensity to bring about its calcination.

Within excavation PH2, a number of deposits yielded animal bones. Eight fragments were recovered from topsoil 2000, whilst contexts 2003 and 2004 (the two infills of feature F200), yielded three and ten fragments, respectively. Those from deposit 2004, the earlier of the infills, were in poor condition.

The topsoil (3000) in pole-hole PH3 yielded one intact bone (limb) and two fragments, whilst one fragment was recovered from deposit 3003, which abutted wall foundations F300. Four bone fragments were found in layer 3005, which underlay feature F300.

A number of animal bones was found during the excavation of pole-hole PH4. The topsoil (4000) yielded six fragments, including part of a jawbone, whilst 24 fragments were recovered from deposit 4003 (infilling feature F401). The latter included several pieces of jawbone (one of which was a large fragment, containing three teeth) and four individual teeth.

Deposit 5001, infilling feature F500 in excavation PH5, yielded 21 fragments of animal bone. One fragment was clearly recognisable as a vertebra and another consisted of a piece of tooth enamel. The physical appearance of the broken edges on at least two bones suggested that they had snapped along lines weakened by cut-marks, indicating possible evidence of butchery.

7.0 Discussion

The topsoil deposits from each of the five excavations yielded artefacts ranging in date from the Roman period up to the present time. Fragments of overtly modern building debris were common within the topsoil, but none were retained. With the exception of the topsoil (5000) from pole-hole PH5, animal bones and pottery sherds were recovered from the surface layer in each of the excavations.

The groundworks illustrated that archaeology relating to the Roman occupation of the site survives beneath the front lawn of the Wroxeter Hotel, at a depth of 0.7m or more below the current ground level. In excavations PH1, PH2 and PH5, the remains took the form of negative features cut into the subsoil layers immediately underlying the topsoil. Unfortunately, the limited scale of the excavations restricted the amount of information that could be gleaned regarding the alignment, purpose and extent of the features. However, the infills of the cuts did contain dating evidence.

Spot-dating of the pottery from infill 1002 of feature F100 (excavation PH1) gave a TPQ of the late 4th century, whilst that of the Roman pottery sherds from the overlying topsoil (1000) was late 3rd century. The infill (1003) of feature F101 was similar in appearance to the topsoil layer and yielded pottery of the same period as the latter. This tends to support the notion that feature F101 is relatively modern and had been backfilled with topsoil (1000).

Within excavation PH5, a very short distance to the south of PII1, the infill (5001) of feature F500 yielded pottery with a TPQ of the late 3^{rd} century. However, as the boundary between the overlying topsoil (5000) and the infill (5001) was indistinct, it is conceivable that some of the sherds actually came from the topsoil layer.

Pole-hole PH2 (some 36m to the north of excavation PH1) cut through feature F200, whose main infill (2004) contained pottery sherds that were spot-dated to the mid-tolate 2^{nd} century. The topsoil (2000) that overlay the feature yielded Roman pottery with a TPQ of 120AD. Pole-hole PH3 was located very close to the northernmost tip of the hotel lawn and its excavation generated topsoil (3000) which yielded Roman pottery sherds with a TPQ of late 1^{st} to 2^{nd} century. The groundworks also revealed the remains of wall foundations (F300). Unfortunately, there were no easily-dated artefacts associated with the feature; nor in the subsoil layers either immediately below (3005) or above (3002) the foundations. However, separate groundworks through the adjacent public highway (northwest of excavation PH3) exposed further building foundations of similar appearance and those were dated to the Roman period (Krakowicz and White 2002).

Excavation PH4 was sited in a field (pasture) to the north of the hotel and the hole was dug in a location that had been subjected to earlier disturbances. From the evidence visible in the sides of the pole-hole, it appeared to be cutting through a large, relatively modern pit (F400), sealed beneath a thick layer of topsoil (4000). Whilst the infill (4002) of feature F400 and the overlying topsoil (4000) both contained fragments of Post-Medieval building debris, only the latter layer yielded pottery. Roman pottery sherds recovered from the topsoil had a TPQ of the 2^{nd} century. Also revealed by this excavation was an earlier feature (F401) that had been severely truncated by pit F400. The remnants of the feature's infill (4003) yielded Roman pottery with a TPQ of late 2^{nd} to early 3^{rd} century.

When reviewing the assemblage of Roman pottery as a whole, one must take into account the limited amount of excavation that took place during this project. On that basis, it is not possible to discern if differences in TPQ between artefacts recovered from features close to the Wroxeter Hotel (F100, F500) and those from beneath the lawn further north (F200) indicate some type of trend in Roman activity across that area. Adding the results of this watching brief to other archaeological evaluations in the locale, to give an overview, may show if there is some significance.

8.0 Acknowledgements

The watching brief was undertaken by Roy Krakowicz, working in conjunction with Andrew Rudge when surveying-in the excavations. The report was written by Roy Krakowicz and edited by Dr. R. White, the Project Manager. Jane Evans identified, dated and commented upon the Roman pottery finds. The figures in the report were prepared by N. Dodds.

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Fig.1





Fig.3