

An Archaeological Watching Brief
at
Kings of Wessex School
Cheddar
CS 14



St Columbanus' Chapel ruins with Kings of Wessex Academy in the background.

grid reference ST 4575 5295

planning permission Sedgemoor District Council (17/13/00065/NM)

Carried out for: Kings of Wessex Academy by:

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Report Number 490

<p>An Archaeological Watching Brief at Kings of Wessex Academy, Cheddar</p>
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Summary

An archaeological watching was undertaken to monitor the excavation of foundations and service trenches for the construction of a single storey extension to the existing leisure centre to form changing rooms (see Figure 1). A single ditch was recorded, with no datable finds but containing a species of snail imported by the Romans (*Cornu asperum*). Discussion of the significance of the ditch covers other evidence from archaeological investigations and from written sources to explore the likelihood of Dark Age activity on the site.

1.0 Introduction

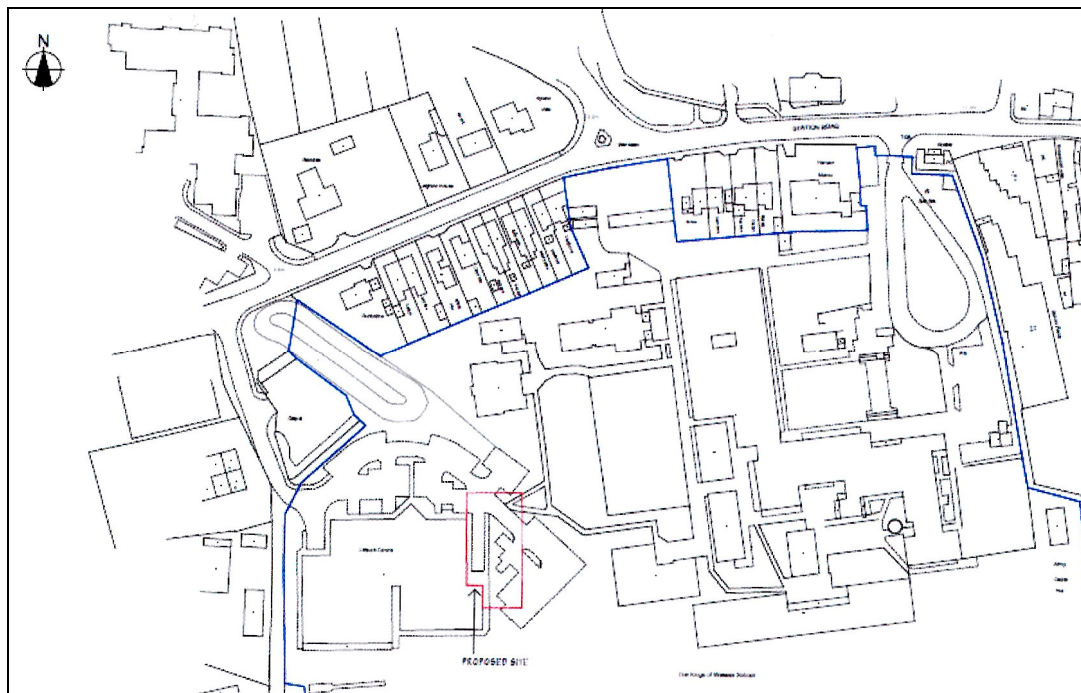


Figure 1: The development (outlined in red).¹

1.1 The Kings of Wessex Academy lies within the nationally important site of Roman settlement, Anglo-Saxon and Norman royal palace and St. Columbanus' Chapel at Cheddar, Somerset (NGR ST 45783 53002) is Scheduled Ancient Monument number 1017290 (county number 29673; Figure 2).

1.2 The Kings of Wessex Academy was granted planning permission (17/13/00065/NM) to erect a single story extension to the existing leisure centre to

¹ Courtesy of LED Architects Ltd, Drawing no. 25, job no. 4131.

form changing rooms. The extension, measuring 375 square metres, is located at the north western edge of the scheduled area (see Figure 1).

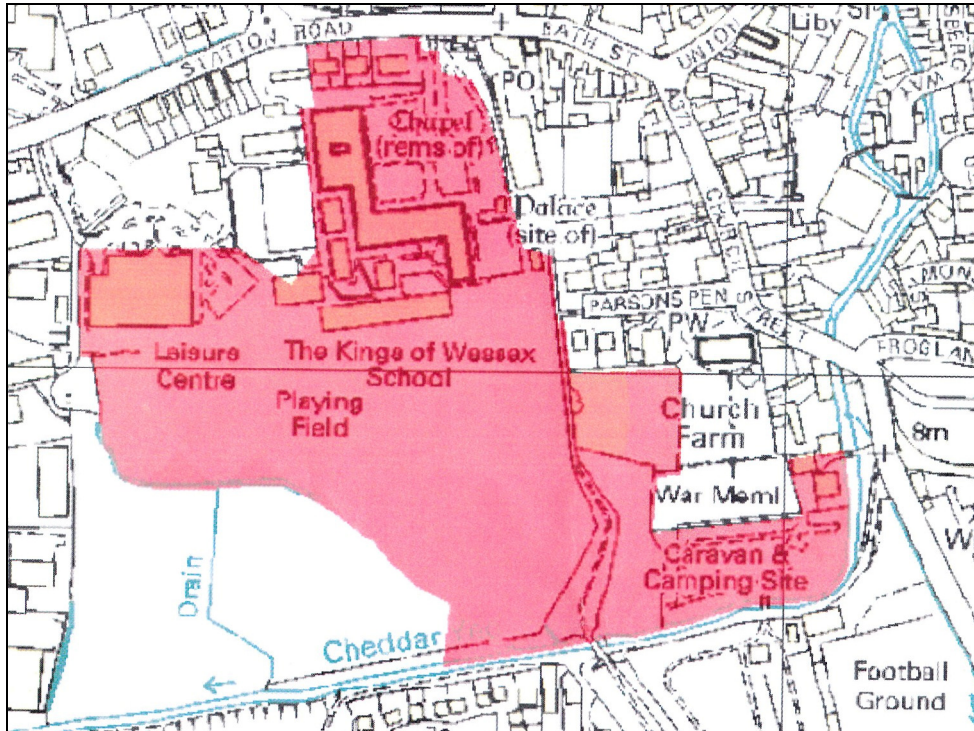


Figure 2: The scheduled area.

1.3 The planning permissions were granted with an archaeological condition. After consultation with Melanie Barge, English Heritage Inspector for the South West region, C. and N. Hollinrake Consultant Archaeologists presented a written scheme of investigation which was granted Scheduled Monument Consent.

The monitoring of the new development was carried out by David Roberts assisted by Dawn Roberts and Emma Smith, at various periods as construction works progressed, between Monday 13th January 2014 and Wednesday 16th April 2014.

1.4 The project was managed by David Piper of LED Architects. The contractor was Mike Gillingham of MBR Gillingham.

1.5 The first phase of the watching brief commenced on Monday 13th January 2014 and continued until the end of the month and consisted of the monitoring the excavation of trenches for foundations and services. The second phase in mid-April monitored the excavation of the foul water trench to the north of the building and the cutting of steps from the car park to the playing field.

A second phase of work in April produced no results.

2.0 Topography and Geology (See Figures 3 and 18)

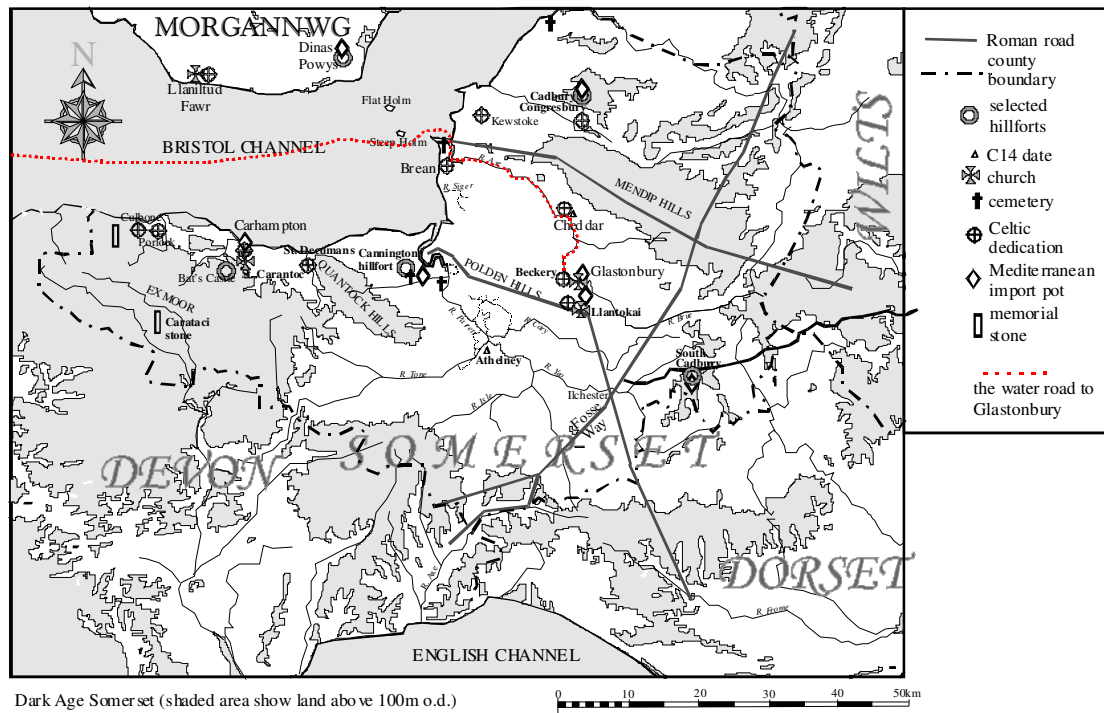


Figure 3. Location map showing Cheddar's place on the water roads of Somerset². This map shows the River Brue in its pre-thirteenth century course flowing into the River Axe, prior to the Brue being diverted into its modern course.

2.1 Topography

The name of the school - Kings of Wessex Academy refers to the Saxon palace discovered on the site prior to the school being built. It lies within a district in the centre of Cheddar abundant in important archaeological features dating from the Roman to the Saxon and Medieval periods, focusing on a Roman villa, a Dark Age and Saxon church, a Saxon royal palace and a medieval manor house, all occupying much the same site.

This district lies with an area defined by roads and the River Axe, with both the church and the villa lying close to the crossing of the river. The river to the south of the site appears to have been channelled but there are indications that a curving field boundary echoing the 25m contour crossing the site may follow the original course of the river and might mark the southern boundary of the church estate.

In the Romano-British period the River Axe would have been the nearest river to the Mendip lead mines and for this reason it has been suggested that there was a

² Hollinrake, 2007.

small Roman port in Cheddar, most likely in the location where the road from Cheddar Gorge crosses the river, where the church is situated³.

To the north of the Saxon palace and the medieval manor house, the road encompasses a market cross and another wide cross road with an irregular width between the two. To the north of this road, on the corner, lay the Old Showground, confirming this piece of the road as a market district. Blair⁴, has suggested that a large monastic zone can be recognised stretching from Bath Street and Station Road south to the canalised Yeo, with an entrance on the north-east side opposite the medieval market cross, possibly predating the palace and in place from at least the 9th century.

The Cheddar Valley Branch of the Great Western Railway, a.k.a. ‘The Strawberry Line’, cut through this historic district on a large stone rubble embankment, which was not removed until as late as 1999.

2.2 Geology

The site lies above deposits of Gravely Head over Keuper marl which supports soils of the Longford Series; neutral to acid, often stoney, brown to grey brown, sandy and loamy soils over gravel Head and/or red marl with mixed riverine clay and gravel alluvium to the west and south.⁵

On the fringes of the Somerset Levels, as with this site, land is usually waterlogged below the 10m/25ft contour.

³ Hollinrake, 2007.

⁴ Blair, 1996:112

⁵ Findlay, 1965.

3.0 Archaeological Background (See Figure 18)

The most complete record of findings from the area of the Kings of Wessex Academy is found in the Somerset Historic Environment Record (**HER**)⁶.

3.1 Prehistoric

There is little evidence for prehistoric activity on this site and the earliest archaeological finds and features generally relate to the Romano-British period.

3.2 Roman

HER 11441 Roman Villa

grid ref.: ST4591 5298

Parch marks, visible in 1975 in the Vicarage garden, have been interpreted as marking the walls of a Roman villa on this site. Many Roman finds have been found in this area, including tesserae, burials and large quantities of ceramics and metal objects. A small rescue excavation adjacent to the villa site took place in 1970 which showed a metalled access to the site and some evidence of 2nd century industrial working (Hurst & Rahtz 1973). A watching brief on the construction of houses adjacent to the Vicarage at Parson's Penn produced similar results (Hurst & Rahtz 1973). Roman material has also been found at the King's of Wessex School excavations over a wide area suggesting that this was an extensive villa complex (Gater 1990, Hawkes 1991).

3.3 Anglo-Saxon

HER 11442 Anglo-Saxon and Norman royal palace, and St Columbanus' Chapel

National Monument No: 29673

grid ref: ST45765299

The monument includes the core of an extensive area of Roman settlement overlain by an Anglo-Saxon royal palace and meeting place which was later used as a royal residence by the Normans. The medieval chapel of St Columbanus, which is Listed Grade II, stands as a ruined structure within the complex.

The findings of wall plaster and tesserae (for mosaics) indicate the presence of high status Roman buildings and a number of 4th century coin finds demonstrate that occupation may have extended towards the end of the Roman period and probably beyond. The villa estate, with boundaries probably still recognisable and perhaps still functioning, would have attracted interest among the Saxons who arrived in the area in the 7th century AD and this, together with its prime location, may have been instrumental in the site being chosen for the establishment of an important Anglo-Saxon settlement by the 9th century AD at the latest.

A major excavation by Rahtz in the 1960s, ahead of the construction of The Kings of Wessex School, demonstrated the below ground presence of the foundations of a long

⁶ <http://webapp1.somerset.gov.uk/her/details.asp?prn=11442>

hall and other timber buildings on ground just a little to the north of the Roman buildings. They represent the earliest recorded phase of the Saxon settlement which could reasonably be dated to the early 9th century. This has been interpreted as a royal household in which the area occupied by the Roman buildings may have been developed as a farm or settlement which supported and supplied the needs of an adjacent royal enclosure represented by ditches and banks to the north, west and east.

Documentary evidence has demonstrated that the site may be identified as the location of the Cheddar witenagemots (where the king met his council) of 941, 956, and 968. The meeting of 968, in Edgar's reign, was held at Easter and is the most completely recorded. Further documents show that the royal palace was visited by both Henry I and Henry II at various times in the 12th century.

The site was handed over to the church in 1204 by King John and was acquired by the Bishops of Bath and Wells in 1230, and it was finally abandoned, apparently in the 14th century. After the Reformation, St Columbanus' Chapel passed into secular hands and was in use as a dwelling until 1910 when it was partially demolished; it survives as a roofless structure with four walls standing and is supported at its eastern and western ends by modern buttresses.

St Columbanus' Chapel survives as the shell of a Norman chapel which is known to have developed from Saxon origins. Its outer walls survive although they have been considerably altered during use of the building for domestic means.

The below ground remains of the earlier Saxon chapel are encompassed within the walls and the chapel illustrates the development of an ecclesiastical building from Saxon to Norman times.⁷



Figure 4. Reconstruction drawing of the period 2 palace complex.⁸

⁷ English Heritage Scheduling listing
- http://magic.defra.gov.uk/Metadata_for_magic/rsm/29673.pdf – accessed 17/07/14.



Figure 5: Ruins of St Columbanus' Chapel in the school grounds.

HER 13146 Former chapel dedicated to St Columbanus

ST 4573 5316

Former chapel, now ruin. Early C14. Random rubble, oblong on plan, diagonal corner buttresses, that north-east missing; Featureless north and south walls lowered to approximately one metre of the ground, end walls remain except the upper portions of the gables; roof completely missing. Western elevation has door opening in a chamfered stone surround with a pointed arch head; above a blocked window, deep splays and segmental pointed rere-arch to the inside of this wall. East wall with a blocked window, single trefoiled head of the tracery remaining, deep splays, cusped rere-arch. Remains of a pent-roofed single storey outshut to east end, roof missing; massive buttress to centre of east wall. Adjacent to former Saxon royal palace.

English Heritage Listed Building Number: 268795. First Listed on 29/01/1985.
English Heritage Unified Designation System Asset Number: 1173737

HER 10410 Church of St Andrew and churchyard, Cheddar

ST 4595 5295

The present building (with the exception of the C13 chancel) was built between 1350-1450 and is probably the 4th church on the site. The tower has many reused Roman bricks. The church was restored in 1873 by William Butterfield. Almost certainly a minster.

⁸ Alan Sorrell, Plate III, Rahtz 1979.

Richardson⁹ considers that, although The church of St. Andrew and Church House date in part to the Norman period and mainly to the 13th century they are likely to have origins in the Saxon period as part of the minster complex.,.

3.4 Industrial

In 1869 a branch line of the Bristol and Exeter Railway (later part of the Great Western Railway) was opened extending through Cheddar. Until its closure in 1964, an embanked section of the railway line ran southeast to northwest across the site. This line was subsequently dismantled and this area is now the School sports field.¹⁰ The arch for the footpath passing through the embankment was recorded prior to demolition.¹¹

3.5 Previous archaeological work

The numerous previous archaeological investigations of the scheduled area are listed under their HER numbers in the bibliography. A discussion of the previous work which is relevant to the results of this watching brief may be found in the Discussion.

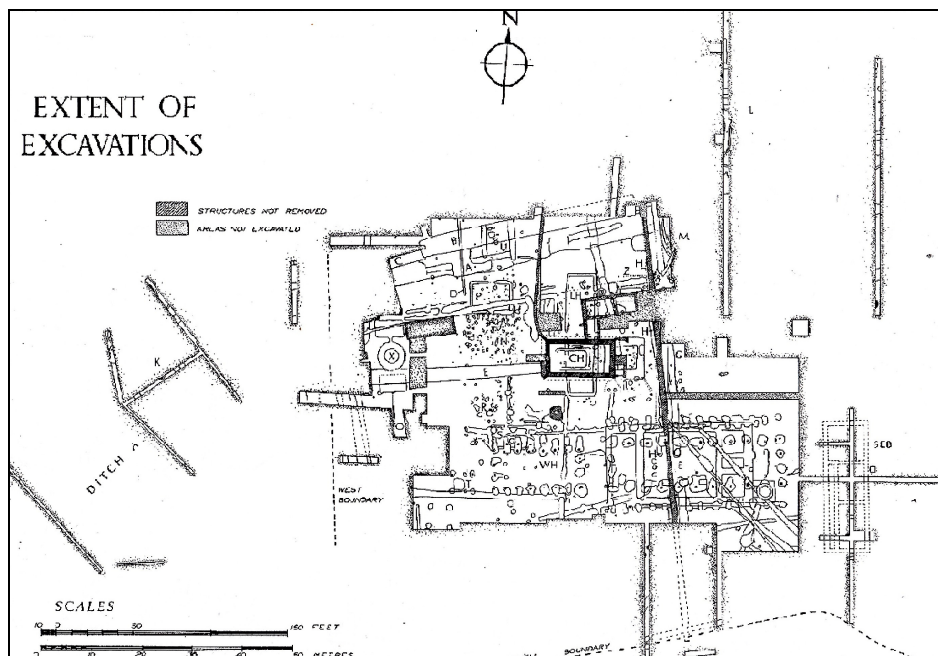


Figure 6: The 1960s excavation plan¹².

⁹ EUS survey, p. 7.

¹⁰ English Heritage *Monument Management Plan, King's of Wessex School, Cheddar*. P1.

¹¹ Hollinrake 99.

¹² Rahtz, 1979.

The finds and features revealed in these projects have emphasised the wide spread of Romano-British material stretching from the church in the east to the area of the leisure complex to the west of the school. This impressive range of Romano-British material, taken in conjunction with the national importance of the Saxon and Medieval royal halls recorded below the school by Phillip Rahtz in the 1960s, resulted in the scheduling of the school grounds.

4.0 Historical Background

4.1 King Alfred's will

King Alfred bequeathed a number of estates, including Carhampton, to his eldest son, Edward the Elder, with a clause asking the community [*hiwum*] at Cheddar, "*to choose him [Edward the Elder] on the terms which we have already agreed on*"¹³. This grant was ratified in 904x925 by King Edward the Elder's grant which defines the terms referred to as involving compensation for lands at Carhampton by granting Banwell and Compton Bishop to Cheddar¹⁴. Interpretation of this passage rests partly on the nature of the community at Cheddar, which was probably a community of clergy, judging by later references to Cheddar Minster¹⁵. Banwell and nearby Congresbury were both described by Asser as 'British' churches¹⁶. This comparison to a religious community suggests that Carhampton was also probably of similar religious status. This is the earliest indication of another of the key features of the site – the Saxon ecclesiastical community which was recorded as *Cheddarmynster* by Domesday.¹⁷

This is taken to be the ancestor of the parish church of St. Andrew, along with the usual range of buildings typical of early monastic sites including other chapels, the community's conventual buildings and industrial work spaces. It has been postulated that this community grew up around the Roman buildings recorded on the site (HER 11441)¹⁸.

¹³ Finberg 1964, 127

¹⁴ Pearce 1978, 118

¹⁵ Rahtz 1979, 13

¹⁶ Stevenson 1959

¹⁷ Blair, 1996, p112.

¹⁸ Cheddar EUS, p. 4.

4.2 Domesday Book

As the Domesday Book of A.D.1086 records, Cheddar was a large and important royal manor incorporating the settlements of Axbridge and Wedmore and the Forest of Mendip.¹⁹

Lands of the King; entry 1;2

CEDRE. King Edward held it. It has never paid tax, nor is it known how many hides are there.

Land for 20 ploughs. In lordship 3 ploughs; 2 slaves; 1 freedman;
17 villains and 20 bordars with 17 ploughs.

7 people who pay 17s in tribute.

In Axbridge 32 burgesses who pay 20s.

2 mills which pay 12s 6d;

3 fisheries which pay 10s;

meadow 15 acres; pasture 1 league long and as wide.

6 cattle, 15 pigs, 100 sheep.

It pays £21 2 1/2d a year at 20 pence to the *ora*.

Woodland 2 leagues long and 1/2 league wide.

Of this manor Bishop Giso holds 1 member, **Wedmore**, which he held himself from King Edward. William the Sheriff accounts £12 for it in the King's revenue every year.

From this manor 1/2 virgate of land has been taken away which was part of the lordship revenue of King Edward. Robert of Auberville holds it value 15d.

These two manors of **Somerton** and **Cheddar**, with their dependancies, paid *firmum unis noctis* before 1066.

This is the second entry in Domesday, coming after Somerton, and this position indicates the wealth and importance of the estate. The practice of *firmum unis noctis* involved the collection and storage of food and provisions against the time that the peripatetic King, his household and his retinue visited the estate, making these estates the heartland of the House of Wessex. Domesday illustrates how the Cheddar estate contained everything the royal household required: large expanses of arable (20 ploughlands) and the villains, bordars and slaves to work the farms, meadows, pastures and woodland; a small town of 32 burgesses in Axbridge, probably a port; the Rivers Axe and Yeo for navigation and fishing and the power for milling; and the Forest of Mendip for game and recreation for the court and for minerals, especially lead.

¹⁹ Thorn,1980.

The above estate (and the entire kingdom, when the King was in residence) was administered from the royal complex at Cheddar which will also have regularly accommodated the royal household. Witangemots, when the king held meetings with his council, were recorded in Cheddar for the years 941, 956 and 968²⁰.

4.3 Medieval period

The palace continued in use as a royal residence into the medieval period, with recorded visits by Henry I and II. There is documentation of a rebuilding programme by King John in 1209. In 1213, however, John granted the royal estate to Hugh, bishop of Lincoln, who passed it on to his brother Jocelin, bishop of Wells.

The evidence from excavation suggests by about 1400 the area of the palace was pasture and orchard, part of the closes and paddocks of Hannam manor²¹. (see the historic maps).

²⁰ HER 11442.

²¹ EUS p.4.

5.0 Historic Maps for King's of Wessex School, Cheddar.

5.1 1839 Tithing Map

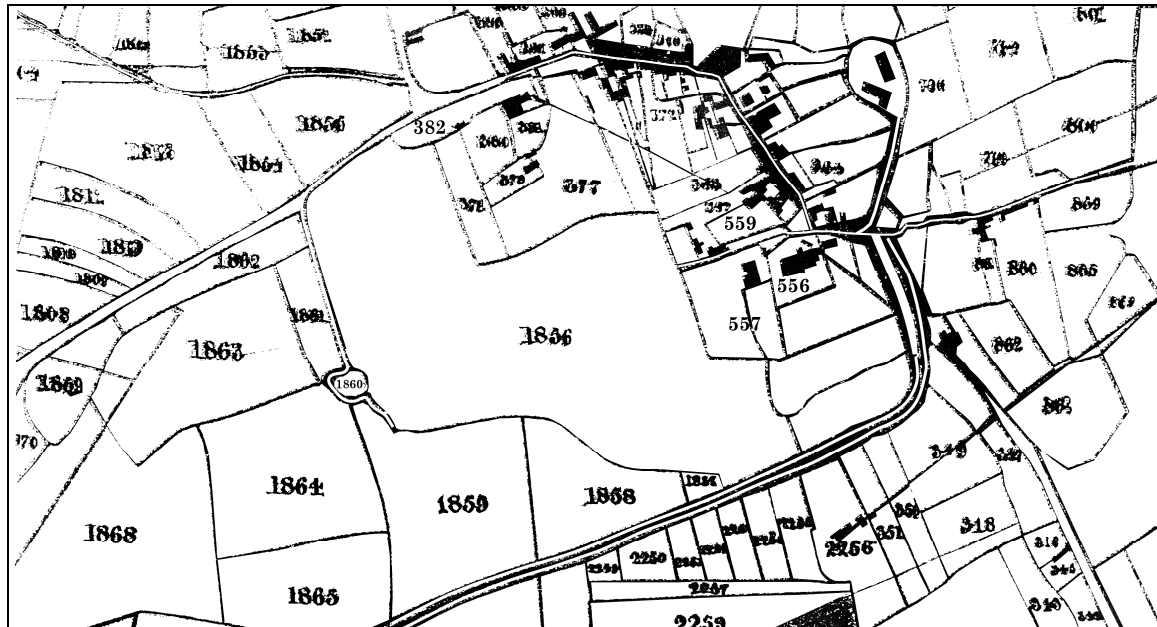


Figure 7. 1839 Tithing Map.

Plot no.	Name	Use	Owner	Tenant
552		House, garden & orchard	Rev. Richard A'Court Beadon	Himself
556		Church & churchyard		
557	The Vicarage	House, garden & orchard	Rev. Richard A'Court Beadon	
558	The Parsonage	Barn & Penning	The Dean & Chapter of Wells Cathedral	
559	The Parsonage	House	The Dean & Chapter of Wells Cathedral	
582.	Court House	Farm yard & outbuildings	Walter Long Esq	
1856		Pasture	Ditto.	George Yeodens Ford
1857	At Stoney Stile	Pasture	Ditto.	Ditto.
1858	At Stoney Stile	Pasture	Marquis of Bath	Henry Star
1860		Garden	Walter Long Esq.	George Ford
1861	At Meadyeats	Orchard	Marquis of Bath	James Keel

From above it can be seen that there are four main blocks in this area of Cheddar:

- the first being the parish church and vicarage;
- the second being the parsonage grounds immediately north of the church;

- the third being Hannam Manor, owned by Walter Long and including the present school grounds and playing fields north and east of the curving boundary;
- and the fourth portion being the ground south and west of the curving boundary which was owned by the Marquis of Bath.

5.2 1886 OS map

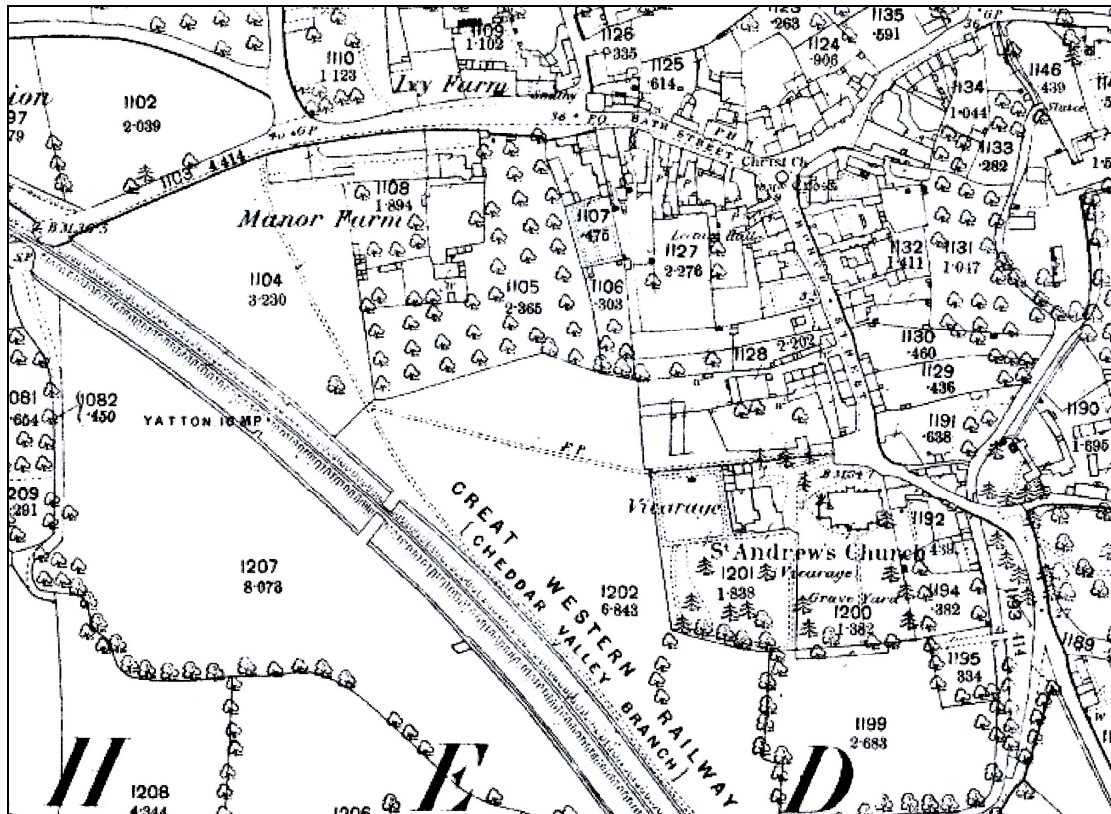


Figure 8. 1886 O. S. map.

By 1886 the railway embankment had been constructed. The footpath, first shown in this map, may be of considerable antiquity since the Romano-British building (HER 12891; see **Figure 18**) respects its alignment.

The area of the palace complex has been planted as orchards.

5.3 1903 OS map

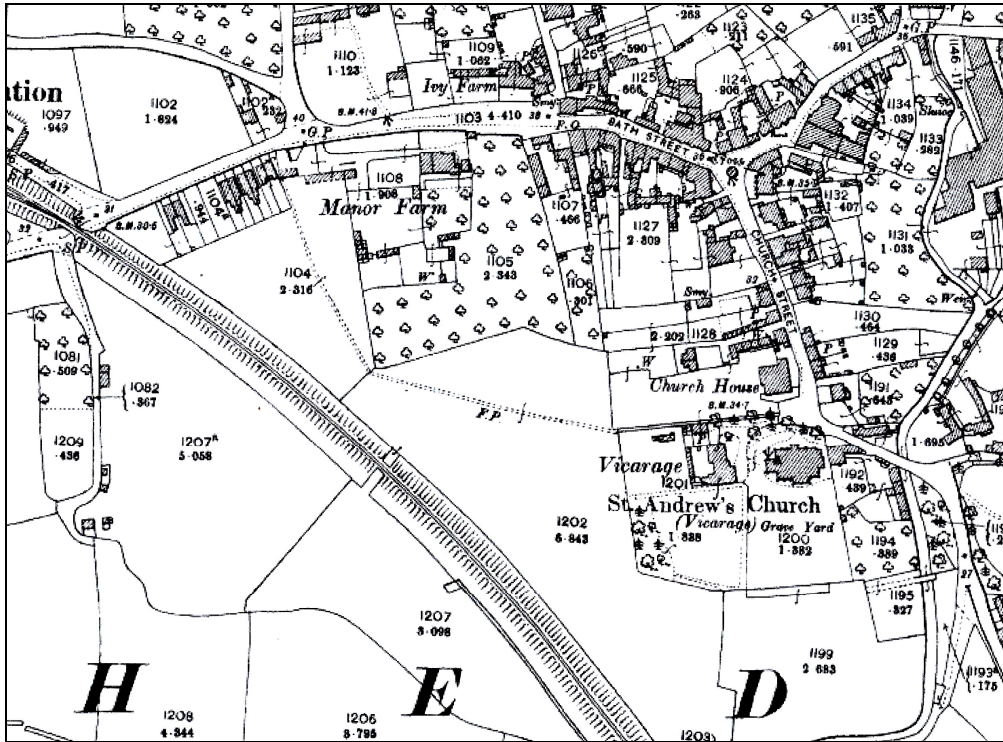


Figure 9. 1903 O. S. map.

5.4 1930 OS map

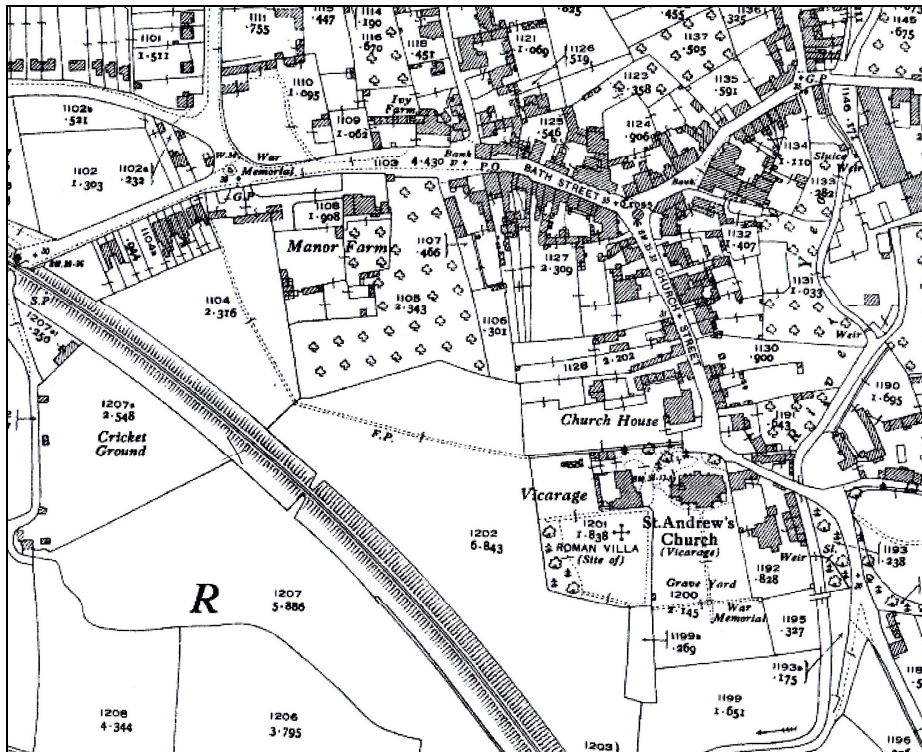


Figure 10. 1930 O. S. map.

5.5 1977 OS map

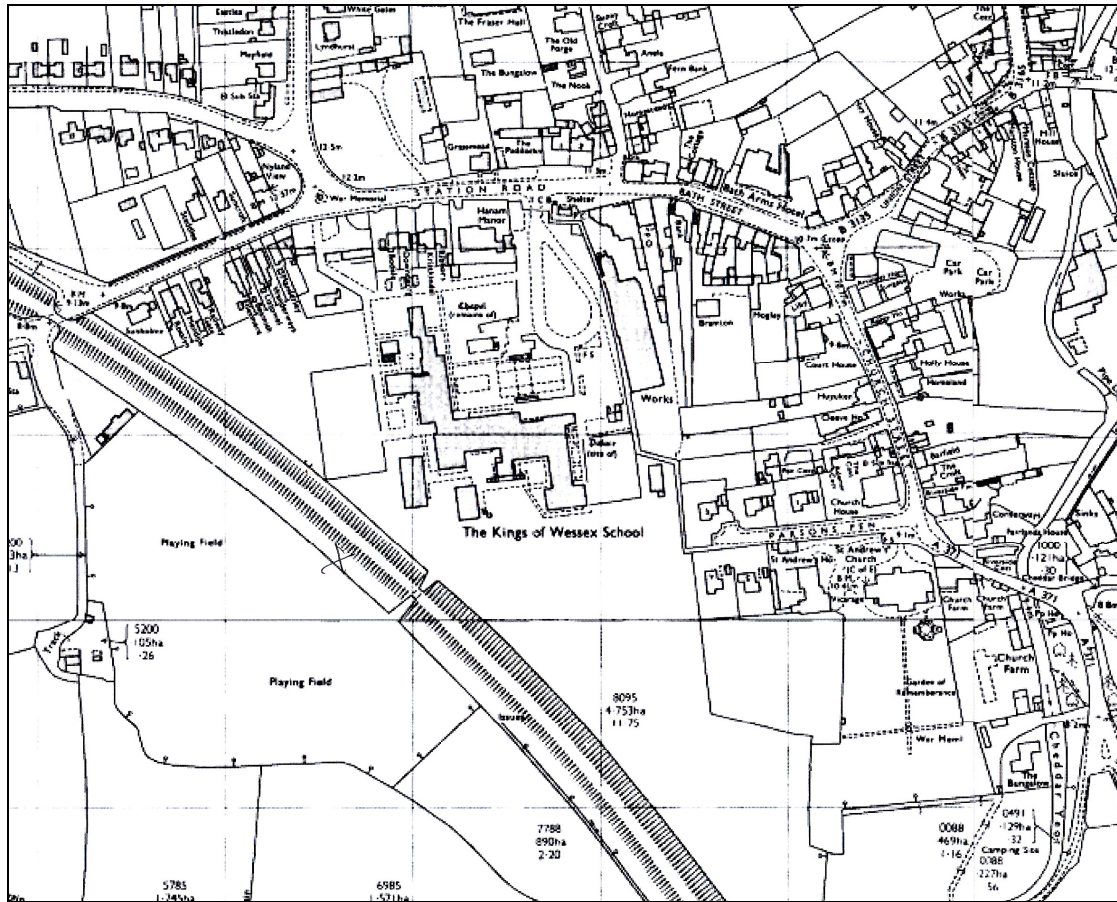


Figure 11: 1977 O. S. map.

6.0 Observations

6.1 Methods statement

The written scheme of investigation stipulated the following methods:

- Any features found were half sectioned and drawn at a scale of 1:10 for sections and 1:20 for plans. The service trenches were also planned at a scale of 1:20.
- Context numbers for the various deposits and features were allocated and written descriptions were recorded on *pro-forma* context sheets. The context numbers assigned to the first phase of works ran from (1001) through to (1008).
- Levels above Ordinance Datum were taken throughout. The Ordinance Survey benchmark used is situated at St Andrew's Church and has a value of 10.41m above mean Ordinance Datum (a.O.D). All levels have been listed on *pro-forma* level sheets
- A day book was kept listing daily events, visitors, observations and etc..

6.2 Stratigraphy

The uppermost context on site was (1001), a very hard, compact, reddish grey mixed 70% stone/rubble and sandy clay c.0.90m thick. It contained modern demolition materials. This context extended throughout the excavation site and was found below the modern tarmac and foundations. This context was 'made up ground', probably from destruction of the railway embankment. Same as deposit (1003) but with demolition rubble and C20th materials.

Below this was context (1002), a moderately compact, dark blackish brown fine silt c.0.30m thick containing no significant inclusions. This context extended throughout the excavation site. This was the original topsoil of the natural ground level before being covered by the demolition rubble from the destruction of the railway embankment. It was noticed that between this layer and the 'make up' layer above it was a layer of geotextile material, believed to have been laid down during previous works.

Subsoil (1003) was a compact, mixed reddish brown and yellowish-grey mixed rubble/stone deposit and sandy clay. It was c.0.30m thick and extended throughout the excavation site.

The natural geology (1006) was a compact, reddish brown mixed rubble/stone and sandy clay containing frequent river wash deposits.

In effect, the Leisure Centre is built upon a raised platform constructed of the ballast from the railway embankment, as can be seen in Figure 12.



Figure 12. Photograph of the mound of railway ballast below the Leisure Centre.

Although the foundation and service trenches were deep enough to penetrate through this thick stony layer, at less than a metre wide such was the width of the trenches that only the largest features could be recognized under these conditions.

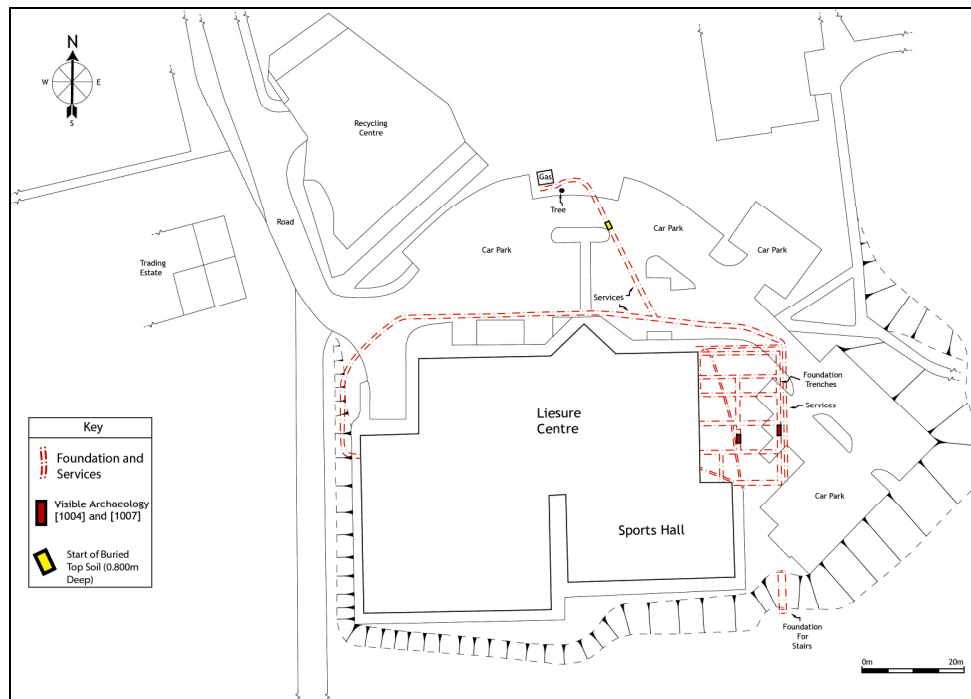


Figure 13: Plan showing foundation and service trenches marked in red²².

²² Courtesy of LED Architects.

6.3 Ditch [1004]

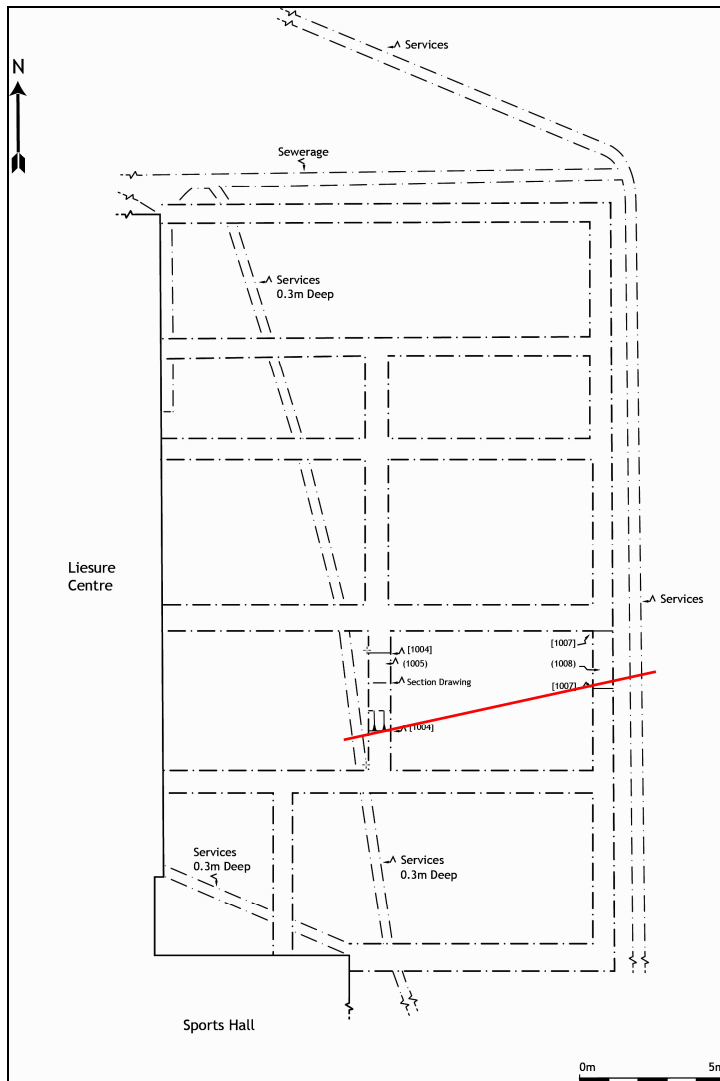


Figure 14: Foundation and service trenches with the south edge of the ditch shown as a red line.



Figure 15. The stratigraphy of the site is evident in this photograph of ditch [1004] taken in the trench facing north. The geotechnical membrane can be seen on either side of the trench.

On Monday 20th January the first section of a linear feature was recorded in the N-S footing trench. This feature was given the cut number [1004] which was rectangular in plan (in footings trench). It appeared to be aligned roughly E-W and was 0.60m deep, 2.70m wide N-S and of unknown length. It had a gradual break of slope-top, slightly concave sloping sides, gradual break of slope-base and a flat base.

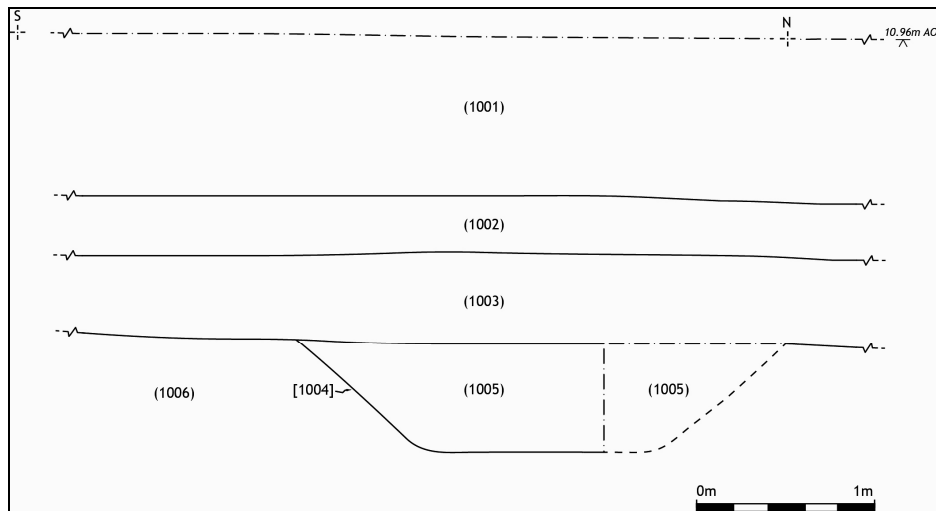


Figure 16: Section drawing of ditch [1004].

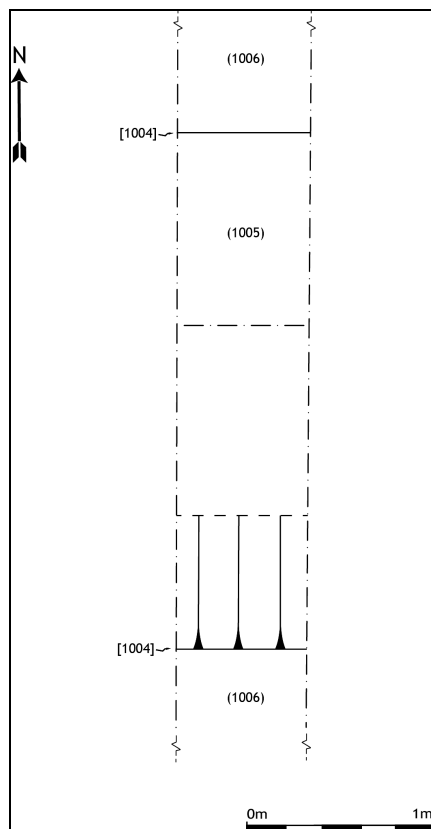


Figure 17. Plan of ditch [1004].

Ditch [1004] was filled by (1005), a moderately loose, mid-dark brown silty clay containing abundant mixed stones including river rolled smooth stones, frequent snail shells, occasional bone and fragile daub. A sample from this context was sieved and analysed, the resulting report can be found in the Appendix 2.

6.4 A probable continuation of this feature was found a few days later (Weds. 22nd Jan) in another of the foundation trenches. This was given the context numbers [1007] and (1008). All the details of these contexts were the same as above apart from the measurements which in this case were: depth = c.0.30m, width = c.2.08m.

6.5 Finds

No datable finds were recovered from either ditch section. All the other finds from the watching brief were modern and were discarded. The complete archive, including field notes, field plans, recording and levels forms and correspondence will be deposited in the Somerset Heritage Centre.

6.6 Samples

Two types of samples were collected from ditch [1004]:

- animal bone for radiocarbon determination;
- soil samples which produced abundant mollusc shells, produced as Appendix 2 below.

In assessing the snail evidence, Matt Law was able to describe the environment prevailing in the ditch:

‘The mollusc fauna reveals the presence of a shaded environment in the ditch, probably tall vegetation rather than woodland. The presence of water is also suggested, although it does not appear that the ditch permanently carried a large volume of water’.

Among the species identified was one of significance to the dating of the ditch:

Cornu asperum is a relatively recent arrival in the British Isles, first appearing in contexts of Romano-British date (Evans 1972, 175; Davies 2010, 176).

When viewed in the context of a feature without datable finds, the identification of *Cornu asperum* in the fill indicates a Dark Age date for this feature. This theory can be tested by radiocarbon date of the bone from the same context.

7.0 Discussion

7.1 Dark Age archaeology is notoriously difficult to identify. The centuries after the collapse of the Roman administration in the late-fourth century until the early ninth century were lacking in the production of the artefacts most relied upon to date archaeological features: pottery and coinage. The written sources are equally sparse before the creation of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles by King Alfred in the ninth century. This was understandably silent on the activities of the native British population prior to the invasion of Somerset by the army of Wessex in the late-sixth century. Detection of Dark Age activity, therefore, depends on close examination of subtle primary data.

Ditch [1004] is not the first indication of Dark Age activity at Cheddar; signs of pre-Saxon, post-Roman activity have been recognized in the vicinity for some time. The signs derive from a variety of different sources and the identification of another piece of evidence provides a good opportunity to review the evidence as it exists to date. The location spots of the archaeological evidence are numbered in **Figure 18** and will be discussed in order below.

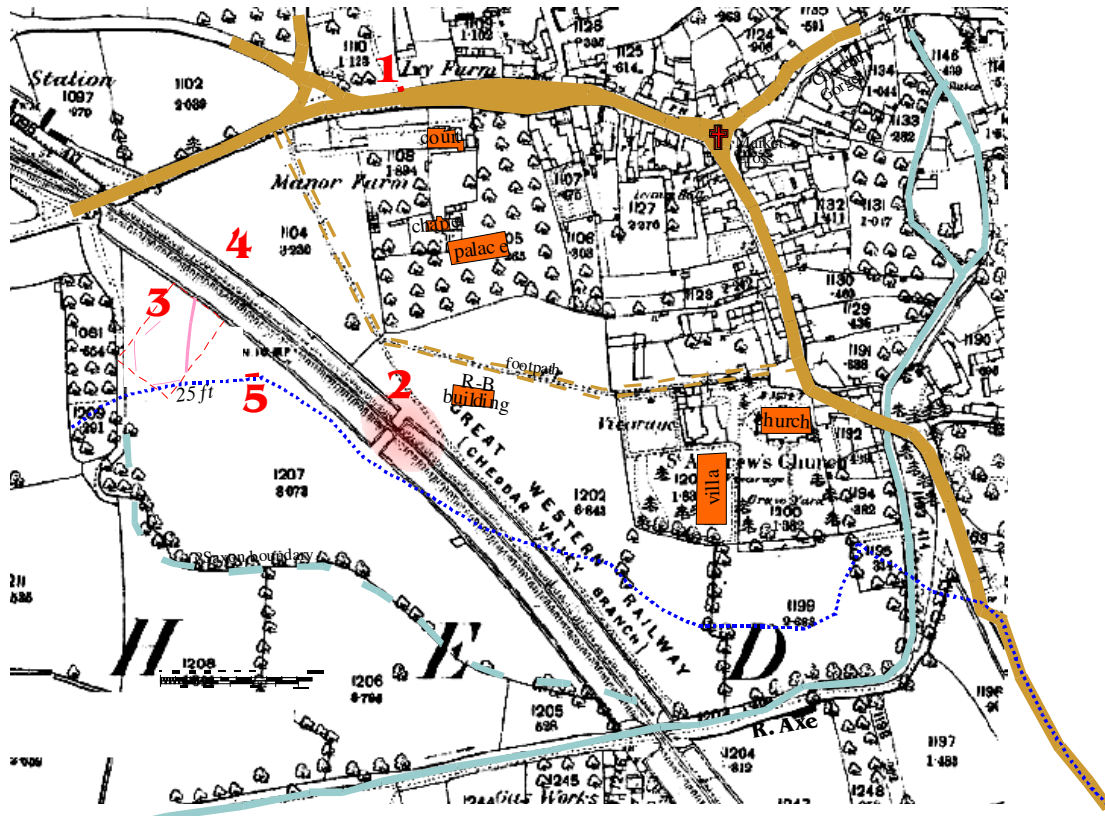


Figure 18. Archaeological sites referred to in the text superimposed on the 1886 OS map. The dashed blue line marks the suggested former course of the River Axe, before it was channelled into its present course. Land below the 25m contour was normally waterlogged. Significant buildings are indicated in orange. .

1) The Old Showground²³

PRN 57180 Evaluation (1998), The Old Showground, Cheddar
ST 457 533

Further evaluation to that carried out in 1997 ([PRN 57178](#)) was carried out following a geophysical survey ([PRN 57180](#)). Trench 3 lay at the N of the site and contained two groups of post holes and associated gullies and pits. These appeared to date to the medieval and post medieval periods. Trench 4 showed a general paucity of archaeological features although a general scatter of C11/12 - C14 pottery was recovered. Trench 5 lay along the western edge of the site and located a number of features including sizeable ditches, but few finds. One of the ditches had previously been recorded in trench 2 and, in view of its width and shallowness, have been a holloway. {1}

A series of evaluations was undertaken within The Old Showground following on from the first series in 1997 and a subsequent geophysical survey of the site. The results were complicated by metal debris in the soil, possibly resulting from use as a fair and showground, and by the existing tracks and mounds of rubble on the site. However, a number of features were interpreted as being of possible archaeological significance these including ditches, pits and possible tracks.

²³ Hollinrake and Hollinrake, 1998.

The trenches recorded further evidence for medieval occupation on the site together with medieval and (?) late-Saxon boundary features.

Very little flint was recovered suggesting that prehistoric occupation was not concentrated in the area. Some Romano-British pottery was recovered but in such small quantities it presumably came from the known sites to the south.

A radiocarbon assessment on a fragment of horse bone from deep within a large and undated ditch at the eastern end of trench 1 in 1997 produced calibrated dates of: 407-533 cal AD (at 1 sigma), 346-557 cal AD (at 2 sigma) suggesting a date in the second half of the 5th century AD.

Subsequent excavations in 2001²⁴ interpreted the large ditch (Ditch 1) as a Romano-British feature, but, in the absence of any pottery or other datable find in the fill, the radiocarbon date²⁵ should be interpreted as consistent with a date at which Roman pottery is no longer in use. This ditch was cut by a smaller ditch (Ditch 2) containing late Roman pottery (sherds from a late 3rd or 4th century Dorset Black Burnished ware jar), which was used to date the larger ditch, but which should be regarded as residual, unless there was an error in the radiocarbon date. The lack of datable finds from the large ditch would argue against that, however.

2) Romano-British building and lead slag

This building was recorded in 1999.

HER 12891 Watching brief (1999), Kings of Wessex School, Cheddar²⁶
ST 458 530

The main structure recorded was a discontinuous but broadly rectangular structure of varied build quality. On the E side was a clearly defined wall footing in two sections each c100mm wide and constructed of large unbonded limestone rubble. The gap appeared to be deliberate and the presence of pennant flagstone suggests an entrance. Congresbury wares of C3-C4 date were recovered. The substantial nature of these indicates a large superstructure. The E end of this wall turned S but at the W end the structure changed to smaller and less well consolidated stone, on a slightly different alignment before turning S. Within the building was a clear line of 3 large post pads with suggestions of the position of a 4th (spacing may suggest a 5th).

As well as pottery from Samian to Colour-coated wares was recovered as well as metal objects (some by metal detector). Lead items included working fragments, pot repair straps and a late medieval cloth seal. Cu alloy objects included an early-midC1 Colchester type brooch and 87 coins (spanning 161-378 AD) . Many of these were in

²⁴ Evans and Hancocks, 2006.

²⁵ AA-29356, 1600+/-45BP, 340-570 cal AD (OxCal version 3.1).

²⁶ Broomhead, 1999

poor condition but there appears to be an unusual preponderance of coins from 330-348 (54%) which may suggest a dispersed hoard.

Later in the same year a watching brief was undertaken on preparations for a new playing field.

HER 57100 Watching brief (1999), Kings of Wessex school playing fields, Cheddar²⁷

ST 457 529

A watching brief was maintained on the removal of the railway embankment ([PRN 12963](#)) and levelling of the area to the south to construct playing fields. Large quantities of Roman material were found, particularly from the area under the embankment to the SW of the aisled building (see [PRN 12891](#)). Other finds were concentrated in the area between the railway and the drain which forms the edge of the moor.

The cluster of finds marked as '2' on Figure 18 contained such a quantity of lead fragments which showed signs of melting that it raised the possibility of a lead-smelting hearth in the vicinity; the building described in HER 12891 is an obvious possible venue.

Other finds from this vicinity were pottery sherds with large lead rivet repairs. The pottery was Black Burnished Ware, the ubiquitous kitchen ware of the Romano-British period and, presumably, one of the cheapest to purchase. Although mending pottery by means of lead rivets is a well-known practice during the Romano-British period, it is usually reserved for large or rarer types of vessels, not such commonplace product as Dorset black burnished ware. The implication is that the repair took place at a time when all types of ceramics were becoming scarce; sometime, that is, after the collapse of the Roman administration in Britain.

Over half of the coins recovered (all apparently of 4th century date) were very worn and indecipherable, suggesting that they may have been in circulation for a considerable period.

In short, the process of accumulating and melting down lead scrap was occurring at a time when coinage and pottery were becoming scarce. It may be that this activity is part of the Dark Age trade with Byzantium, when ship-loads of pottery vessels and other exotic goods were traded for metals and wool from western

²⁷ Hollinrake 1999.

Britain.²⁸ The pottery reaching Britain from the Mediterranean was produced from the mid-fifth to the late sixth centuries. Gaulish pottery was imported into the seventh century.

Dark Age sites are conventionally dated by findings of this imported pottery (see Figure 3 for other Somerset sites where this rare pottery has been found). At Cheddar we may well be looking at the export side of this trade. Recycling lead from abandoned Roman buildings might have been preferred to the arduous task of mining and smelting raw ore, especially at times when there was a lively market for refined lead to form the basis of a regular import-export exchange.

3) Geophysical survey

A programme of geophysical survey was undertaken in this part of the scheduled area in 1990-91²⁹. One of these surveys covers the area later occupied by the Leisure Centre³⁰, and the findings of this survey have been inserted into the relevant area on Figure 18. See number 5 for further discussion.

4) HER 26098 Excavation (2007), King's of Wessex School, Cheddar ST 4558 5297

An excavation was undertaken in February 2007 prior to the erection of a new drama block. A simple vertical sequence of topsoil overlying sub-soil, alluvial deposits and natural sediments. In addition two ditches, a pit and a posthole were recorded, not dated but likely to be Roman or later in date. Similarities seen in alignment with remains of the Saxon Palace, excavated in 1960-2, raise the possibility these may be contemporary³¹.

This excavation demonstrates that there are zones within the scheduled area which display features without any datable artefacts.

5) Ditch [1004]

The ditch recorded in this watching brief should be seen in the context of these earlier features. Ditch [1004] closely follows the 25m contour, echoing the location

²⁸ Hollinrake 2007b.

²⁹ HER numbers 12742, 12839, 12840, 12841, 12842

³⁰ HER 12742, Geophysical survey (1990), King's of Wessex School, Cheddar; ST 4557 5305
Survey report - Gater, J and Gaffney, C. Kings of Wessex School, Cheddar. Unpublished GSB
Prospection report No: 91/100 (1990) Location: HER files

³¹ Hall, N., Milby, S. and Place, C., 2007.

and orientation of one of the ditches identified in the geophysical survey of 1990 (see **Figure 18**, item 3 above). They are likely to be the same feature.

The presence of *Cornu asperum* in the fill suggests a Dark Age date for the feature, and this might well be the first time that these snails were used to date an archaeological deposit.

7.2 Written sources

The Saxon palace lay next to an ancient chapel with a rare dedicated to St. Columbanus, an Irish cleric whose accepted dates are 543-615 AD. His Life was written by Jonas, a monk of Columbanus' most famous foundation at Bobbio, Italy, only three years after his death.³² The Life records Columbanus's travels through Gaul, where he founded several important communities following his rule, but is lacking in detail about his voyage from Bangor Abbey on the coast of County Down to Brittany. When attempting to account for this rare dedication, it is best seen in the context of other dedications to Celtic saints in Somerset (see Figure 3). It is likely that Columbanus and his party would have broken their journey to Brittany for reasons of logistics as well as to visit other monasteries along their way. If they decided to visit Glastonbury, associated with other Irish saints such as Patrick, Bridget, Indract and Benen, they would have travelled along the Axe/Brue water road.³³ There is no record of the chapel having any other dedication and the possibility exists that this dedication to Columbanus reflects a genuine establishment of his cult by his followers in the mid- to late sixth century.

The implications of the Will of King Alfred have already been discussed in **4.1** above. The likelihood of Dark Age occupation pre-dating the Saxon palace is implied in the Will, as well as by the signs of occupation in the Roman period, as was acknowledged by Philip Rahtz:

It is possible that an early Christian community set up in the ruins of the Roman villa site prior to the Saxon palace foundations or that the remains of the Roman villa estate was granted for the foundation of a minster³⁴

The passage of time has produced more evidence to reinforce this suggestion. Each piece of the above evidence could plausibly be argued away in much the same

³² Munro, 1894.

³³ Hollinrake 2007.

³⁴ Rahtz 1979:13; EUS p. 7

manner as that arising from the radiocarbon date recovered from Ditch 1 at the Old Showground (see item 1 in the discussion above). It is when all the different strands of evidence are drawn together that a convincing body of data of Dark Age occupation emerges, one less easy to explain away using special pleading.

Should the radiocarbon determination on the animal bone from ditch [1004] produce a date similar to that from Ditch 1 in the Old Showground, it should be possible to refer to a Dark Age (i.e. pre-Saxon) phase of activity at the Kings of Wessex Academy site.

Nancy Hollinrake
7th January 2015.

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Digitised sections and plans were drawn by David Roberts and the Lists and Tables were prepared by Dawn Roberts. Sample processing and snail analysis by Matt Law and Emma Smith. The report was written by Dawn Roberts and edited by Charles Hollinrake.

C. and N. Hollinrake

7th January 2014

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List of archaeological investigations

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| HER 12738 | Evaluation (1987), King's of Wessex School, Cheddar |
| HER 12742 | Geophysical survey (1990), King's of Wessex School, Cheddar |
| HER 12760 | Cheddar Palace excavation (1960, 1961, 1962), Cheddar |
| HER 12838 | Geophysical survey (1990), King's of Wessex School, Cheddar |
| HER 12839 | Geophysical survey (1990), King's of Wessex School, Cheddar |
| HER 12840 | Geophysical survey (1990), King's of Wessex School, Cheddar |
| HER 12841 | Geophysical survey (1991), King's of Wessex School, Cheddar |
| HER 12842 | Geophysical survey (1991), King's of Wessex School, Cheddar |
| HER 12843 | Watching brief (1988), King's of Wessex School, Cheddar |
| HER 12844 | Evaluation (1997), King's of Wessex School, Cheddar |
| HER 12845 | Watching brief (1993), Learning Resources Centre, King's of Wessex School, Cheddar |
| HER 12891 | Watching brief (1999), Kings of Wessex School, Cheddar |
| HER 12892 | Evaluation (1999), boundary bank, King's of Wessex School, Cheddar |
| HER 12977 | Watching brief (1998), Science block, King's of Wessex School, Cheddar |
| HER 12978 | Watching brief (1998), service trench, King's of Wessex School, Cheddar |
| HER 15836 | Watching brief (2002), King's of Wessex School, Cheddar |
| HER 15898 | Watching brief (2002), King's of Wessex School, Cheddar |
| HER 24681 | Watching brief (2007), King's of Wessex School, Cheddar |
| HER 24682 | Watching brief (2005-2006), King's of Wessex School, Cheddar |
| HER 26098 | Excavation (2007), King's of Wessex School, Cheddar |
| HER 35934 | Evaluation (1998), King's of Wessex School, Cheddar |
| HER 35937 | Resistivity survey (1999), King's of Wessex School, Cheddar |
| HER 35938 | Magnetic susceptibility survey (1999), King's of Wessex School, Cheddar |
| HER 44731 | Watching brief (1999), cycle path, King's of Wessex School, Cheddar |
| HER 44911 | Watching brief (2000), cycleway, King's of Wessex School, Cheddar |
| HER 44966 | Evaluation (2000), King's of Wessex School, Cheddar |
| HER 57100 | Watching brief (1999), King's of Wessex School playing fields, Cheddar |
| HER 57180 | Evaluation (1998), The Old Showground, Cheddar |

Appendices

Appendix 1 Context list

Context No.	Type	Description of Context	Interpretation	Sample numbers
KEY: Abund= abundant, Freq=frequent, Mod=moderate amounts of, Occ=occasional, Rare=rare occurrences of				
1001	deposit	Very hard, compact, reddish grey mixed 70% stone/rubble and sandy clay. Mod. demolition materials. c.0.90m thick. Extended throughout the excavation site. Below modern tarmac and foundations. Above 1002 .	Made up ground, possibly from destruction of the railway embankment. ?Same as deposit 1003 with demolition rubble and C20th materials.	
1002	deposit	Moderately compact, dark blackish brown fine silt. No significant inclusions. c.0.30m thick. Extended throughout the excavation site. Below 1001 . Above 1003 .	Topsoil of natural ground level; buried turf and topsoil.	
1003	deposit	Compact, mixed reddish brown and yellowish-grey mixed rubble/stone deposit and sandy clay. Mod. silty clay deposit inclusions. c.0.30m thick. Extended throughout the excavation site. Below 1002 . Above 1006 .	Dirty subsoil. Known as 'graw' or 'head'. Mixed with topsoil composition.	
1004	cut	Rectangular (in footings trench). Aligned ?E-W. 0.60m deep. 2.70m wide N-S. Unknown length. Gradual break of slope-top. Slightly concave sloping sides. Gradual break of slope-base. Flat base. Below 1006 . Filled by 1005 .	Cut of ditch.	
1005	fill	Moderately loose, mid-dark brown silty clay. Abund. mixed stones including river rolled smooth stones. Freq. snail shells. Occ. bone, fragile daub. c.0.60m thick. 2.70m wide N-S. Unknown length. Below 1006 . Filled 1004 .	Fill of ditch cut 1004 .	<1>
1006	fill	Compact, reddish brown mixed rubble/stone and sandy clay. Freq. river wash deposit from gorge. Below 1003 . Cut by 1004 .	Natural. Cleaner 'head', same as 1003 , less silty deposition.	

**Appendix 2 Assessment of snails from a watching brief at King's Leisure Centre,
Cheddar, Somerset (CS14)**

Matt Law and Emma Smith

C&N Hollinrake Ltd

February 2014

Introduction and Methods

1 sediment sample was taken from ditch fill (1005) during archaeological monitoring of foundation trenches, and subsequently presented for assessment. The sample was processed using standard methods (Kenward *et al.* 1980), with a 500µm mesh sieve. Shells were identified to species level. Comparisons were made to a reference collection. All identifications were carried out under a low power binocular microscope. Ecological information is taken from Evans (1972), Kerney & Cameron (1979), and Davies (2008). Nomenclature follows Anderson (2008).

For each taxon within a sample, the most commonly represented non-repetitive element (usually the shell apex, umbilicus, or body whorl with mouth) was counted to determine the minimum number of individuals (MNI) present. This avoids the underestimation reported when only shell apices are counted (Giovas 2009).

As an aid to interpretation, taxa were arranged into groups, broadly following those of Evans (1972) and Evans (1991). These are:

- 1a. Gastrodontoidea** (Zontidae of earlier authors), comprising *Oxychilus cellarius*. These are broadly woodland species, present in damp shaded ground.
- 1c. *Discus rotundatus***. Typical of shaded habitats
- 1d. Other shade-loving species**, represented here by *Trochulus striolatus*. This group contains a broad range of tolerances, but usually avoid dry, open conditions.
- 3. Catholic/ intermediate**, comprising *Cepaea hortensis* and *Cornu aspersum*.
- 4. Open country**, represented here by *Vallonia cf. excentrica*.
- 6a. *Anisus leucostoma*** Mostly found in poor freshwater habitats. The sole representative at this site of Evans's 'slum' group.
- 6b. Freshwater catholic**, represented by *Radix balthica*. These are true freshwater species that need permanent water.

The groupings broadly represent a progression from woodland conditions through more open environments to gradually wetter conditions. Although useful as a broad guide, the use of ecological groups may mask fine details, therefore consideration is also made of the tables of species counts.

Results

Minimum number of individuals (MNI) values for the vertical sequence of samples are presented in Table 1. Preservation was largely good.

		Sample Number	1
		Context Number	1005
		Context Interpretation	Ditch fill
Taxon	Ecological Group		
<i>Oxychilus cellarius</i> (O. F. Müller 1774)	1a		3
<i>Discus rotundatus</i> (O. F. Müller 1774)	1c		2
<i>Trochulus striolatus</i> (C. Pfeiffer 1828)	1d		22
<i>Cepaea hortensis</i> (O. F. Müller 1774)	3		16
<i>Cornu aspersum</i> (O. F. Müller 1774)	3		15
<i>Vallonia cf. excentrica</i> Sterki 1893	4		1
<i>Anisus leucostoma</i> (Millet, 1813)	6a		3
<i>Radix balthica</i> (Linnaeus 1758)	6b		1
Total individuals			63
Taxa s			8

Table 1: MNI values for snails from sample <1>

Discussion

The fauna broadly represents shaded, damp conditions, although there are too few Group 1 species to suggest that the deposit formed in wooded conditions. The presence of water within the ditch is suggested by *Radix balthica* and *Anisus leucostoma*, although the relative scarcity of these snails, and absence of other freshwater snails or ostracods suggests that the ditch water was never deep. *Vallonia cf. excentrica* is generally a snail of open ground, however Evans (1972, 163) lists a small number of sites where living *V. excentrica* have been found in shaded places. *Cornu asperum* is a relatively recent arrival in the British Isles, first appearing in contexts of Romano-British date (Evans 1972, 175; Davies 2010, 176). Along with *Cepaea hortensis* it is tolerant of a wide range of environments.

Conclusions

The mollusc fauna reveals the presence of a shaded environment in the ditch, probably tall vegetation rather than woodland. The presence of water is also suggested, although it does not appear that the ditch permanently carried a large volume of water.

Statement of Potential and Recommendations

The mollusc assemblage is relatively small and need not be retained. No further work on the sample is judged necessary.

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