

Redwood

Stoke Park Road South, Bristol

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Archaeological excavation & recording

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SUMMARY

Archaeological excavation and recording (watching brief) was carried out at Redwood, Stoke Park Road South, Bristol during January and April 2015 respectively. Planning consent for redevelopment of this site was granted subject to targeted excavation prior to development and an archaeological watching brief during ground works. The most significant archaeological feature in the area is the surviving remains of a Roman road (Via Julia) that runs across Durdham Down. This road believed to be part of a route linking Abona at modern Sea Mills with Aqua Sulis (Bath) is conjectured on historic maps to pass through the Redwood site.

Despite the absence of any firm dating evidence excavation in 2015 confirmed the projected alignment taken from cartographic sources (OS 1885) and evidence derived from previous investigative work to the south-east in 1999 and 2001. What could be interpreted as the remains of physically deposited road material was a stone spread recorded in the south-eastern corner of the excavation surviving as a small isolated layer of variously sized and shaped closely laid stones; their rounded/worn nature pointing to sustained wear/erosion. These were set within the subsoil layer, a thin relict deposit of reddish-brown clay overlying the natural bedrock and a similar stratigraphic sequence was recorded in 1899 and 2001.

In the south-western quarter of the excavation area was an exposed and weathered area of natural bedrock which due to its characteristic smooth nature was seemingly utilised as a road surface. Excavation showed that the smooth and rounded nature of the stone was due more to erosion of the exposed rock.

The road deposits were sealed by a layer producing an abundance of residual finds which ranged in date from the Roman to modern periods indicating that the layer was re-deposited from elsewhere and is probably associated with landscaping during construction of the adjacent Chattenden House in the late 19th century when the site was formed part of the formal gardens.

The investigation was not extensive enough to reveal the road in its entirety including roadside ditches. In the event significant truncation within both the east and north sides of the excavation attributed to construction of the former house (Redwood) and swimming pool and root disturbance in the central area, shows that little of the road deposit has survived. No further evidence of the road deposit was observed during the subsequent watching brief.



Fig. 1; site location

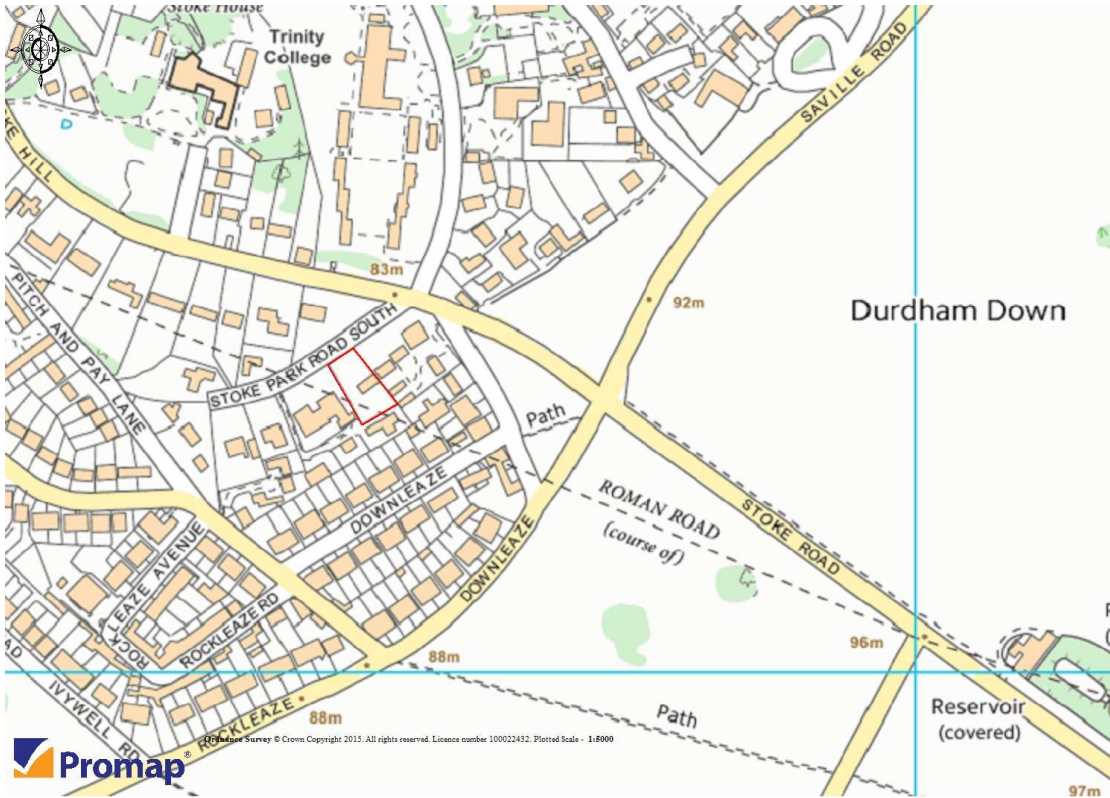


Fig. 2; area of study

INTRODUCTION

Location and scope of works (Figs. 1-3)

This document sets out the results of an archaeological excavation and subsequent recording (watching brief) at Redwood, Stoke Park Road South, Bristol during January and April 2015 respectively. The work was required as a condition of planning permission granted in respect of an application (Ref: 13/05335/F) to Bristol City Council for the erection of two semi-detached dwellings and was undertaken in accordance with a brief (October, 2014) issued by the Principal Historic Environment Officer at the Bristol City Design Group. Planning consent for redevelopment of this site was granted subject to conditions in July 2014 which included a requirement for targeted excavation prior to development and an archaeological watching brief during ground works associated with the development itself. The most significant archaeological feature in the area is the surviving remains of a Roman road (Via Julia) that runs across Durdham Down. This road believed to be part of a route linking Abona at modern Sea Mills with Aqua Sulis (Bath) is conjectured on historic maps to pass through the Redwood site.

Geology and topography

The development site is represented by a roughly north-west to south-east rectangular plot of land occupied by a single detached dwelling with gardens and driveway to the front north-west half and a rear garden to the south-east. A tall redwood tree, from which the property takes its name is situated in the front garden. The area of excavation (outlined in the brief) comprises a small rectangular area between the south-west side of the house and the adjacent boundary and is targeted to investigate the conjectured Roman road alignment. In practice, the north-east side of the excavation will follow the outside edge of the existing building which will be occupied during the excavation. The south-west side of the excavation will run parallel with the existing boundary, but following the outside edge of the pool pump house to avoid existing electrics and plumbing.

The site lies at approx. 85m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) and the underlying geology comprises solid deposits of limestone (BGS, 1979), this was confirmed during excavation.

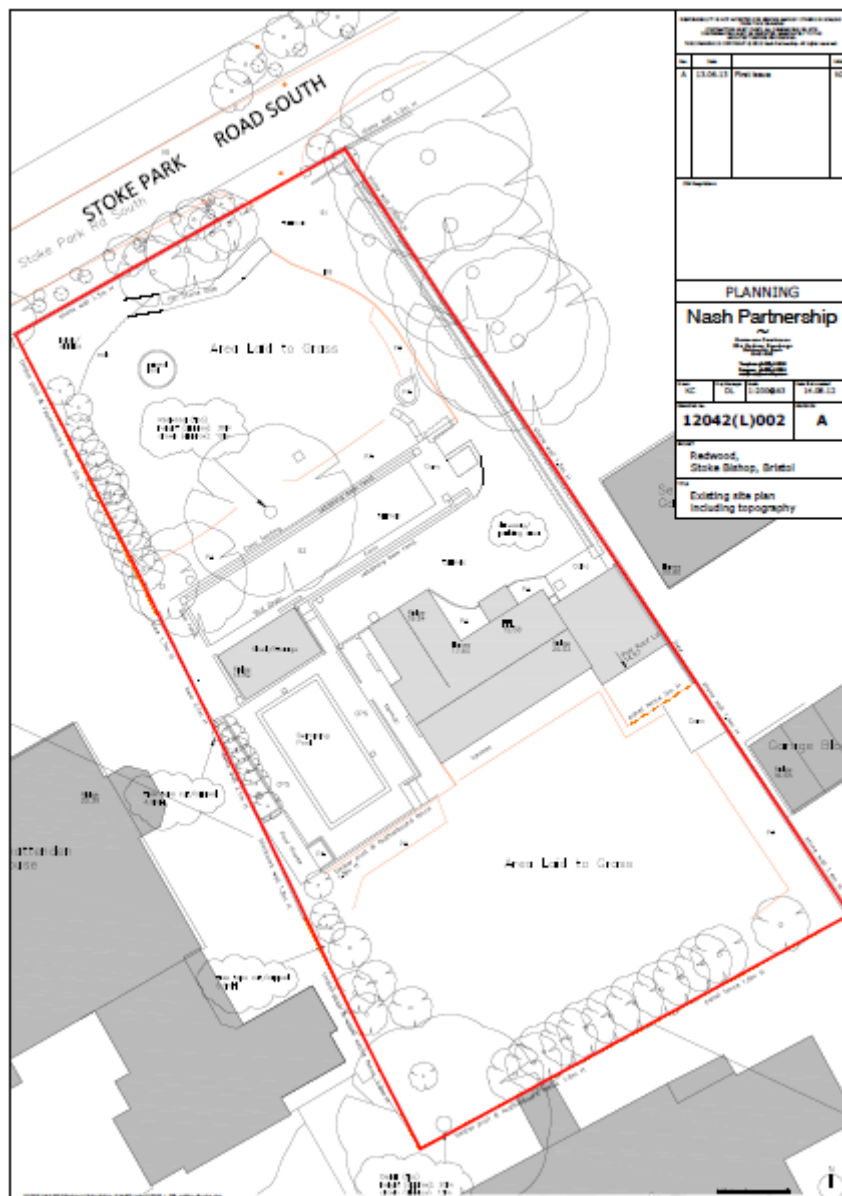


Fig. 3; Redwood 2014

HISTORICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The Bristol Historic Environment Record (HER) was consulted with a search carried out over a 500m radius centred on the site. Significant aspects of the data within the HER that is relevant to the site is included in this report.

At the time of the excavation the Redwood site was occupied by a two storey residential dwelling set within its own grounds to the south of Stoke Park Road South. The property is surrounded on three sides by neighbouring residences and lies close to Durdham Down. The most significant archaeological

feature in the area is the surviving remains of a Roman road (Via Julia) that runs across Durdham Down. This is a Scheduled Monument where it is a visible feature in the area south of Stoke Park Road and east of Downleaze. This road, believed to be part of a route linking Abona at modern Sea Mills with Aqua Sulis (Bath) is conjectured on historic maps to pass through the Redwood site (see brief cover image). Previous archaeological work on the line of the road beyond the scheduled area has recorded (in 1899 and again in 2001) a well preserved metalled roadway with parallel drainage ditches. Until the development of the surrounding Sneyd Park residential area this site lay on open agricultural land of similar character to the Downs.

The HER records (monument number 2084M) an extant section of the Roman road between Bath (Aqua Sulis) and Sea Mills (Abona) (Margary 541) on Durdham Down, located on the south side of Stoke Road between Ladies Mile and Rockleaze. The road appears to have been first noted by the antiquary William Barrett who commented "that some rose-up ground, like an old Roman road, crosses Durdham Down, (where a coin of Constantine was lately dug up)" (Barrett 1789, 10). Seyer, writing a few decades later, described "a stony track on the open down having much the appearance of an old causeway, ten or twelve yards wide. It quits the turnpike road obliquely, and passes in a straight line across the Down due west, which is the direction of Sea mills" (Seyer 1821, 150). Seyer's description suggests that a significant length of the road may have been destroyed since the early nineteenth century. A section was excavated across the south-eastern end of the road in 1899 (SMR 20441) by the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society and the Clifton Antiquarian Club (Trice-Martin 1899; 1900-03). This found a layer of sand overlying rock above which was a "reddish-looking earth." Stones forming the agger of the road were set on this layer. Investigation of the ditches on either side of the road found them to be highly eroded. A section was also dug in the agger further to the north-west, revealing a similar construction.

In 2001 the Bristol and Region Archaeological Services conducted an archaeological evaluation of land adjacent to Stoke Road, Durdham Down, Clifton, Bristol. In July 2001, Bristol & Region Archaeological Services (BaRAS) carried out an archaeological evaluation adjacent to the water tower and reservoir on Durdham Down, Bristol. The work was carried out on behalf of the Neighbourhood and Housing Services Department of Bristol City Council, which proposed to build a re-inforced turf access road onto the Down for special events. The evaluation took the form of a single trial-excavation trench, 15m long and 1.5m wide, opened within the proposed access road footprint adjacent to Stoke Road. The

remains of a cambered rubble and stone spread were recorded in the south-western half of the trench, and a possible truncated ditch on a similar alignment was located c. 4m to the north-west. Despite the absence of any firm dating evidence, these two features were interpreted as the remains of the Roman road which runs across the Down, and one of its drainage ditches. The uppermost segment of the road was preserved only 0.5m below modern ground level. Further road remains preserved within the footprint of the proposed access road should be exposed, investigated and recorded in advance of any groundworks. Steps should then be taken to seal and protect the road surface prior to re-burial and road construction.

In November 2000 an archaeological desk-based assessment (HER20640) of Avonleigh Nursing Home, Stoke Park Road South noted that during the medieval period the area was within tithing of Stoke Bishop in the parish of Westbury-on-Trym. Cartographic and documentary evidence indicates that during the post-medieval period the site was part of a field used for pasture belonging to the Stoke House estate. Most of the estate was sold and the land divided into smaller lots sold for development. Avonleigh was constructed between 1880 and 1884. The site was visited on 8th November 2000 when it was noted that the original garden of Avonleigh had been reduced in size on the north east (and south-east sides) to allow construction of housing. It was concluded that Victorian and modern car parking and the creation of bitmac drives and parking was likely to have removed at least the upper part of any archaeological material surviving on the site (Erskine, 2000).

In September 2001 an archaeological watching brief (HER20939) was carried out Avonleigh Nursing Home, Stoke Park Road South, Stoke Bishop, Bristol during groundworks associated with development of housing on the site. Initially the excavation of six geotechnical trial pits by a mechanical excavator was monitored. Several of the trenches revealed evidence of modern disturbance from drainage or other works. One of the test pits revealed a large concrete cistern several metres long and several metres deep. In the remainder of the pits the limestone bedrock was encountered beneath either a mid- to dark-green clay or a mid-brown silty clay. Groundworks for the development commenced in the south-east corner of the site, and in the south-facing section of a foundation trench a ditch was observed. This was cut into the underlying bedrock and was 0.43 metres deep at its maximum. The width of the feature ranged between 0.23 and 0.80 metres and it was approximately 2 metres long with a rounded northern terminal. Its sides were concave and the base was U-shaped. The fill, a mid-red-brown silty clay with some flecks of charcoal produced two sherds of pottery,

dated to the later Bronze Age. During cleaning of the area surrounding the ditch other sherds of pottery were recovered, including two which were provisionally dated to the Iron Age. On the western and south-western sides of the site a depth of deposits of over 2 metres was noted. The upper contexts dated to the 1980s and were interpreted as the result of construction works. These overlay a sequence of deposits of Victorian material which were thought likely to be related to the construction of the houses along Stoke Park Road South. These deposits extended to the north for approximately 10 metres, filling a cut into the bedrock which was a maximum of 1.9 metres deep. The full extent of the feature was not determined but it was interpreted as a quarry pit which had been used to provide material for the construction of housing on the site in the 1880s (Etheridge, 2002). No evidence for the course of the Roman Road between Bath and Sea Mills was recorded during the work, although the profile of the test pit to the rear of Avonleigh indicated that there had apparently been no disturbance of this part of the site before the construction of a modern patio. No finds dating to the Romano-British period were recovered during the fieldwork.

A Watching brief (HER24618) was carried out in 2008 during pipeline construction from 21 Downleaze Road to Stoke Park Road. Although no archaeologically significant features or finds were recorded modern road material overlying 100mm thick layer of brown compacted sandy clay that overlay a natural reddish grey sandstone bedrock. The second profile recorded a sequence of 250mm of dark grey topsoil overlying yellowish red natural bedrock (Robinson, 2008).

Aims of the investigation

The objective of the excavation was investigate the presence of the Roman road (Via Julia) projected to pass through the south-west side of the site and to obtain an appropriate record of the feature and any associated archaeological deposits or finds likely to be disturbed by the development.

Method and nature of the excavation

The archaeological field work and post-excavation assessment was carried out in accordance with standards and guidance for archaeological excavations and watching briefs produced by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA). Archaeological recording was undertaken to obtain a record of any archaeological deposits or finds disturbed or exposed during excavation of the site. Machine

excavation was only used for the removal of non-archaeologically significant material (modern deposits) and was used to excavate these layers stratigraphically. All machining was conducted under constant and close archaeological supervision at all times using a toothless bucket. Excavation comprised an open area measuring approximately 6 x 10m, the topsoil was removed by machine and the subsequent subsoil layer (context 101) was excavated by hand revealing the underlying road surfaces (contexts 102 & 104).

The objective of the excavation was to fully record and characterise the archaeological remains on the site and to produce and publish in an agreed format a detailed written report on the findings.

EXCAVATION RESULTS (Figs. 4 & 5)

Description of deposits

Contexts 107 (natural geology; limestone)

The surface of the geological horizon or natural substrate (context 107) comprised solid limestone stratum sloping to the north-west. The deposit showed a gradual slope downwards across the site from the south-east to the north-west. Excavation showed that the character of this deposit when exposed in both trenches (in trench one it was deliberately over-excavated) was an undulation of bedrock displaying a 'jagged' profile (see plates 3 & 4). In trench two this unevenness was mitigated by the overlying subsoil layer (context 105) which filled in-between the stones as it extended across the deposit as a thin layer leaving a level ground surface. The road deposit (context 104) was laid directly over this layer in the south-east corner of the excavation. In the area of context 102 (location of trench one), where layer 105 did not extend to, the characteristic 'jaggedness' of the bedrock experienced in trench two was less intense. Instead the surface of the limestone was smoother, seemingly eroded or worn, probably due to a combination of prolonged use and exposure to the elements.

Context 102 (Via Julia)

Situated across the south-west half of the excavation was a deposit of weathered/worn limestone (context 102). The surface of this layer sloped gradually down from the south-east to the north-west. The excavation of trench one showed this deposit to comprise solid limestone (context 107), but the upper surface, unlike the uneven deposit exposed in trench two, was instead flat and smooth with the edges of the stone well rounded. The excavation of trench one

confirmed this characteristic. This would indicate prolonged exposure to the elements.

Context 105 (relict subsoil layer)

Overlying the limestone (context 107) on the north east side of the excavation to a depth of about 0.10m and also to the north-east and north-west was a thin layer of stiff light brown silty-clay (context 105) with a component of small stones. This was interpreted as a relict subsoil/earlier soil horizon and was undated during the excavation. This layer did not extend across the south-west part of the excavation in the area of context 102 which was instead directly sealed by the layer 101 (see below).

Context 104 (Via Julia)

Overlying 105 in the south-east corner of the excavation was a small surviving area of road deposit comprising a single layer of stones set within the surface of the underlying subsoil layer. The depth varied between 0.10-15m depending of the size of the stones and although undated is likely to represent the remains of the Roman road (the Via Julia). The stones varied shape and ranged in size from small to large. Many of the upper surfaces of the stones were noticeably rounded/worn presumably from use and erosion.

Context 101 (re-deposited subsoil)

Overlying the road deposits (contexts 102 & 104) was a layer of dark yellowish-brown clayey-silt (context 101) with the occasional stone fragment. The layer began in the south-east corner of the excavation and continued to the south-west end increasing in depth to a maximum of about 0.20m in the south-west corner. The deposit tapered off towards the north-east half the site which is probably due to later truncation associated with construction of the swimming pool in the late 1960s or early 1970s. This layer was excavated entirely by hand and numerous finds were recovered comprising a few pieces of animal bone; a bottle glass fragment; pieces of clay pipe including a bowl and pottery dated from the Roman period to the 19th century (see finds report; page 35).

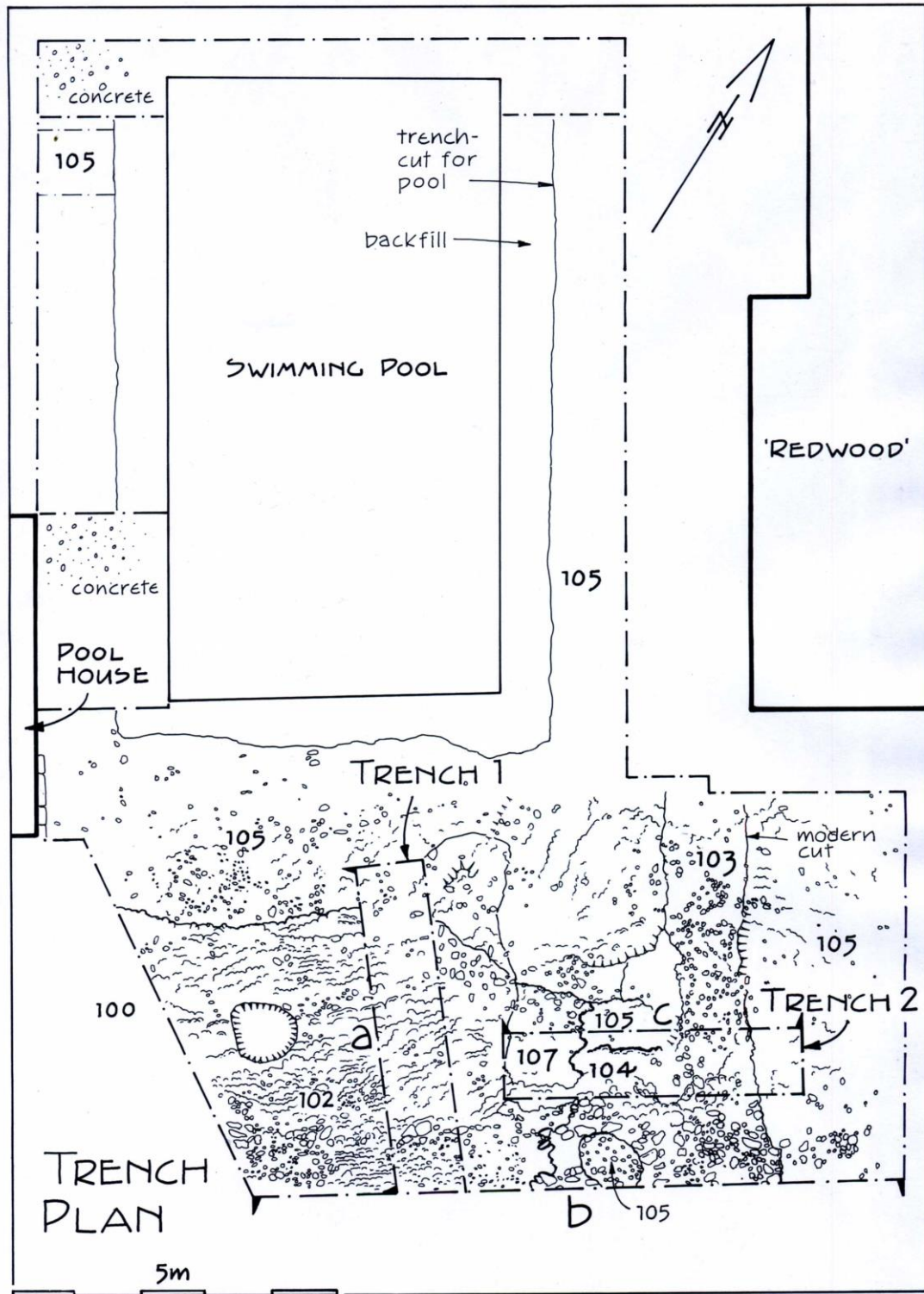


Fig. 3

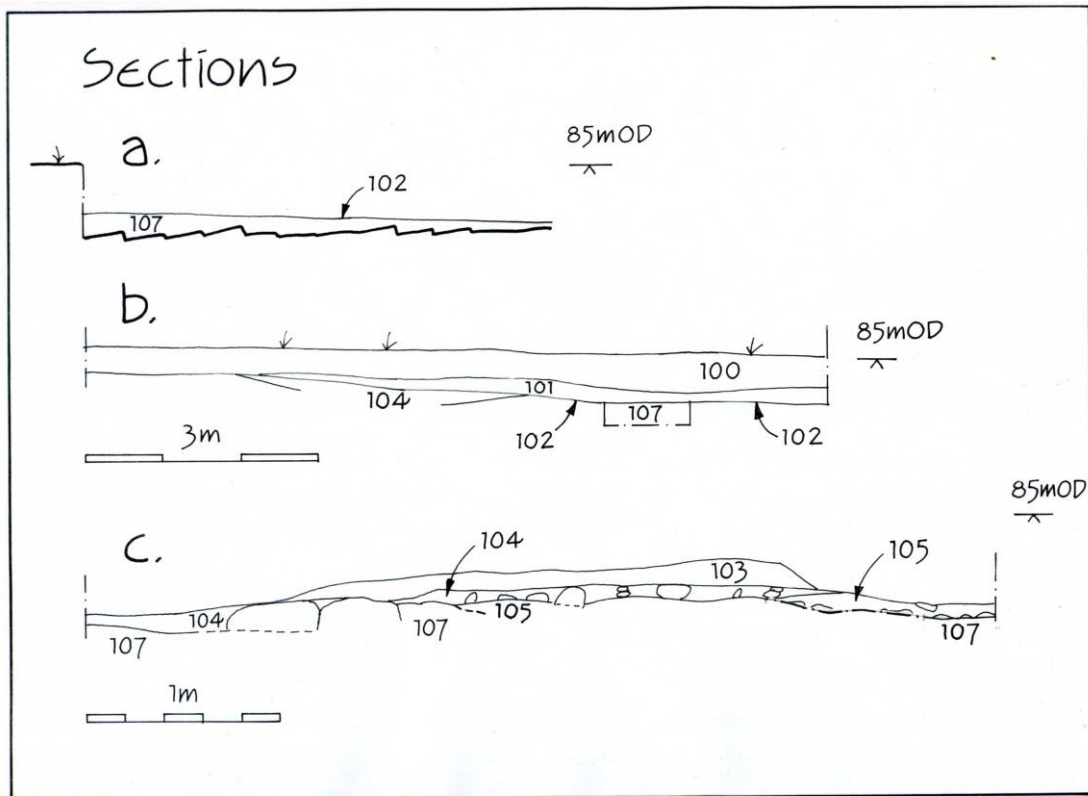


Fig. 4

Context 103 (stone deposit)

Situated in the north-east corner of the excavation was an L-shaped deposit of compacted small stones (context 103) approx. 0.10m deep. It was thought that this might represent the remains of road metalling, but further investigation suggested that it was probably a later landscaping feature formerly associated with Chattenden House.

Context 100 (topsoil)

Overlying context 101, but also the road deposit (context 104) all of the deposits throughout the excavation was the existing topsoil (context 100) comprising a dark greyish-brown loam 0.25m thick at the south-east side and increasing to 0.40m thick in the south-east. No finds were recovered from this layer.



Plate 1; trenches 1 & 2, showing exposed bedrock (context 107), view to the south-west



Plate 2; trench 1 showing exposed bedrock (context 107), view to the south-west



Plate 3; trench 1, south-east end, detail of limestone stratum (context 107)



Plate 4; trench 1, north-west end, detail of limestone stratum (context 107), view to the south-west



Plate 5; trench 2, limestone stratum (context 107) at far end, overlain in the central area by the relict subsoil layer (context 105). Note the limestone stratum reappearing at the end (bottom of trench) beneath context 105



Plate 6; trench 2; as above in Plate 5, view to the north-west, remains of context 104 (?Roman road deposit) in foreground. Note rounded (worn) nature of stones



Plate 7; trench 2, section c, south-west end after removal of context 108 (the darker upper layer) and the underlying ?Roman road deposit (context 104) comprising stones set within a matrix of light brown clay, note upper surface of bedrock (context 107) in bottom left of picture overlain by context 105 (relict clay and subsoil)



Plate 8; trench 2, section a, central area showing context 104 (?Roman road deposit). This is overlain by a an area of compacted stone and soil (context 103)



Plate 9; trench 2, with remains of context 104 (?Roman road deposit) in the centre of the trench. The lower end of trench 2 comprises natural brown clay and stones (context 105). Note bedrock (context 107) appearing in far end of trench and representing the edge between the two natural deposits



Plate 10; trench 2, section c, showing the remains context 104 (after removal of context 103), view to the north-west



Plate 11; trench 1 (background) & trench 2 (foreground), context 104 (?Roman road) deposit visible in centre of trench 2, view to the south-west

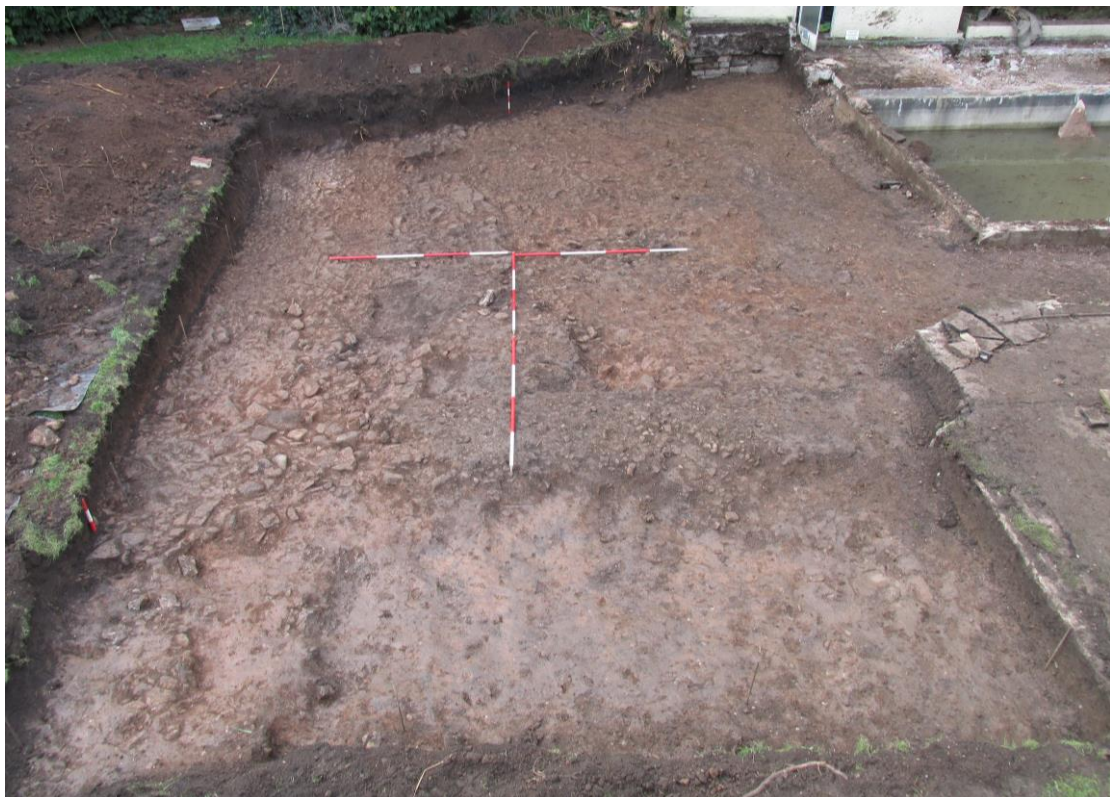


Plate 12; excavation area, overall view to the south-west. Note the line of truncation of deposits along the north-east edge of the excavation, bottom of picture.



Plate 13; excavation area; view to the north-west, swimming pool and house (area of subsequent watching brief) in the background



Plate 14; south-west side of excavation area showing remains of context 102 (Via Julia) comprising the upper worn/weathered surface of the natural bedrock (context 107), view to the north-west



Plate 15; south-west side of excavation area showing the remains of context 104 (?Roman road deposit), surviving in the foreground (bottom of picture) as a single compact layer of stones. There is considerable truncation of deposits to the right of the picture and also in the top left corner towards the pool; view to the north-west



Plate 16; overall view of excavation area from the east, north-east showing remains of Via Julia



Plate 17; overall view of excavation area from the south-east showing remains of the Via Julia



Plate 18; south-west side of excavation showing context 102 (Via Julia) deposit, view to the south-east



Plate 19; central area of excavation showing context 102 (top right) and context 104 (top left). The dark patch in the centre is root disturbance. At the bottom of

the picture is context 105 and the stone is partially exposed limestone bedrock, view to the south-east



Plate 20; south-east side of excavation. Context 104 survives as a small area of stones in the background set within clay (context 105). Note extent of truncation on the left of the picture. Context 103 (probable later garden deposit) lies in the foreground and also appears to have been truncated on both sides

WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS (Figs. 4 & 5)

Description of deposits

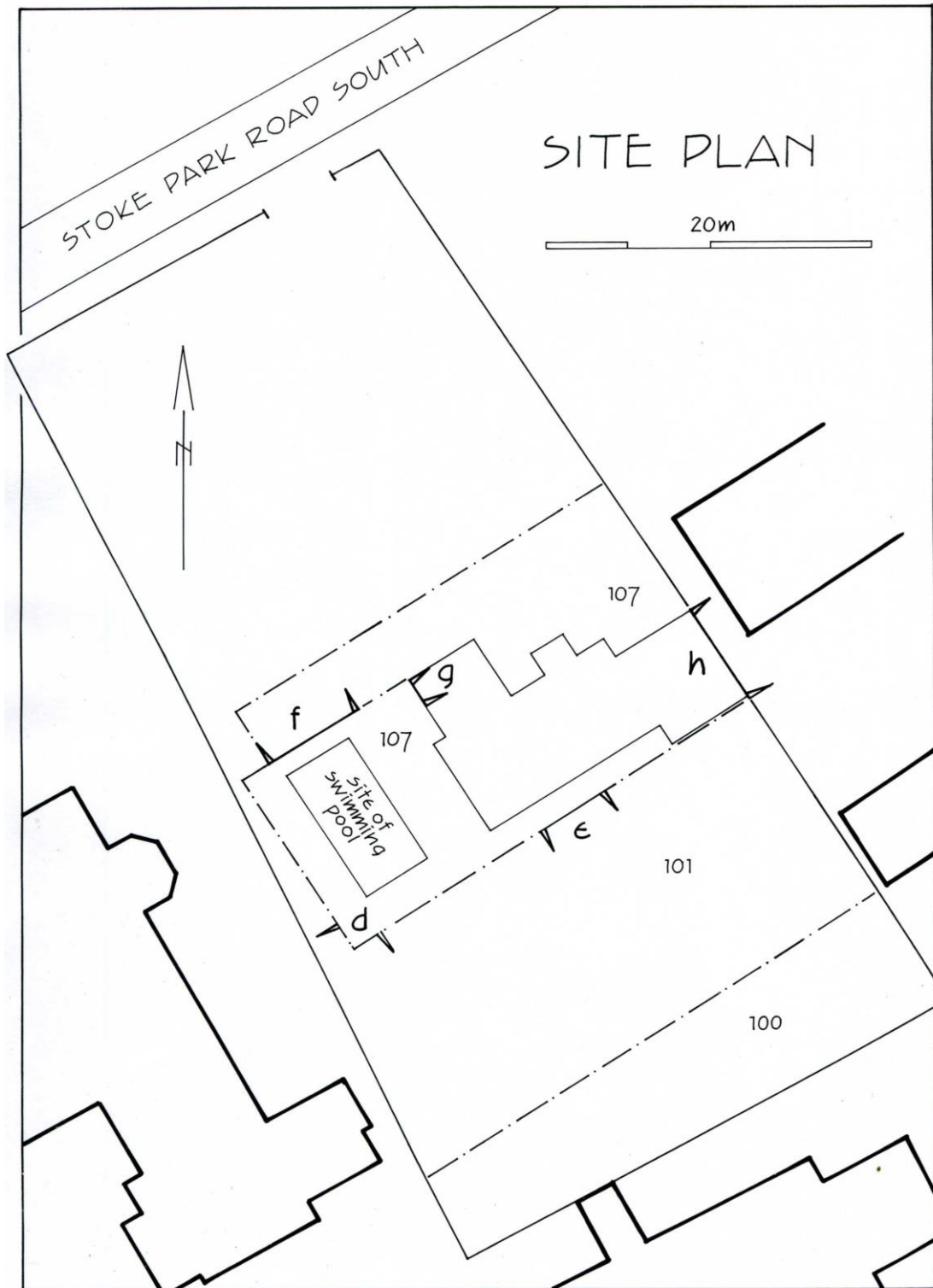


Fig. 5

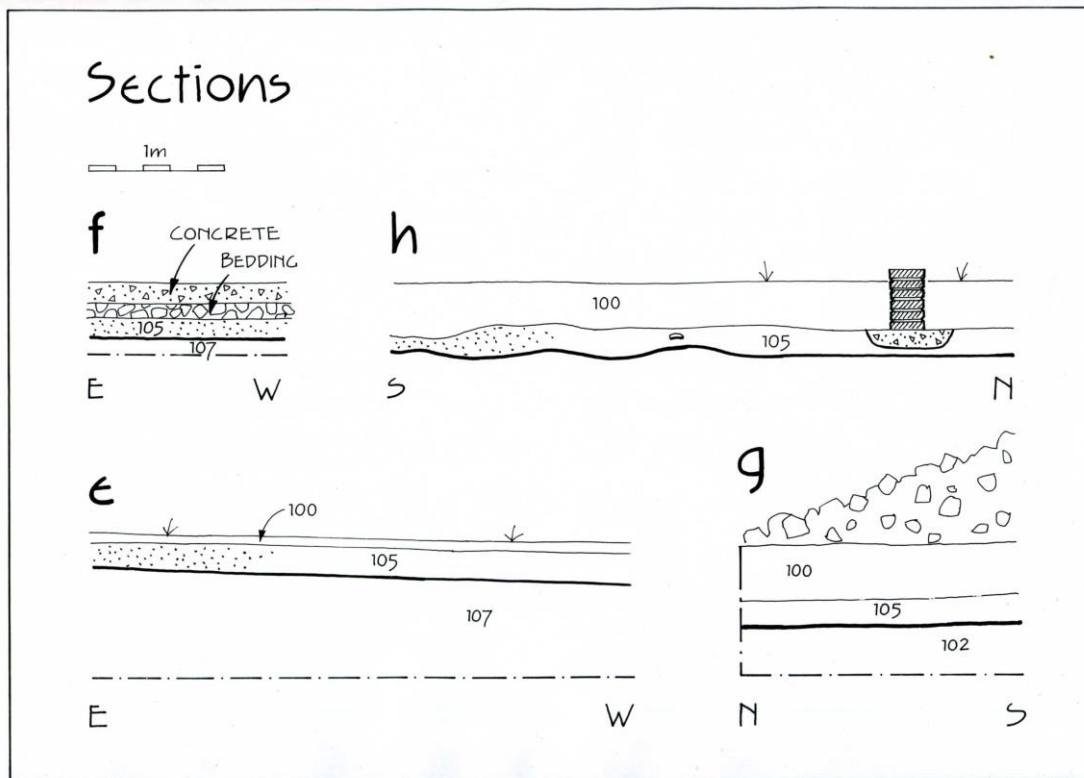


Fig. 6

Context 107 (natural geology/substrate)

The natural bedrock (context 107) was recorded throughout excavation associated with the new development. The results confirmed that the natural geology comprising limestone stratum slopes down from south-east to north-west. The development site represented a flat roughly rectangular area of excavation. To achieve this excavation long the rear south-eastern edge of the site was truncated to a depth of about 1m whilst at the front north-west end truncation was about 0.20m deep.

Context 105 (relict subsoil layer) & context 100 (topsoil)

Recorded overlying the natural geology (context 107) was the ubiquitous relict subsoil layer (context 105) comprising a reddish-brown clay. In most sections around the edge of the excavation this survived relatively intact as a thin layer immediately beneath the darker topsoil layer (context 100). The majority of this deposit within the central area of the excavation was largely truncated during construction of the former house (Redwood) and swimming pool although in some areas it was recorded again surviving intact. The topsoil varied in thickness across the site dependant on the level of truncation.



Plate 21; section d, north-east to south-west arm



Plate 22; section d, north-west to south-east arm



Plate 23; view of exposed section along south-west edge of excavation



Plate 24; section e



Plate 25; section f, detail



Plate 26; section g, overall view



Plate 27; section h, overall view



Plate 28; section h, south-west end, detail



Plate 29; section h, north-east end, detail



Plate 30; section h, detail of medieval pot sherd *in situ* within the relict subsoil layer (context 105) overlying natural rock

FINDS

Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 50 sherds weighing 465g. It all occurred in context 101. It was recorded using the conventions of the City of Bristol pottery type-series (eg. Ponsford (1998, 144), as follows:

| | |
|---------|---|
| BPT5: | Bristol A/B ware. Mid-late 11 th –12 th century. 1 sherd, 3g |
| BPT100: | Bristol Slipware. AD1650-1750. 1 sherd, 2g. |
| BPT112: | North Devon Gravel-tempered ware. 16 th –19 th century. 1 sherd, 57g |
| BPT197: | Oxidized glazed Malvernian ware, late 13 th –early 17 th century. 3 sherds, 42g |
| BPT202: | Mass-produced white earthenwares, 1795+. 24 sherds, 153g. |
| BPT277: | English Stoneware. 1680+. 1 sherd, 13g. |
| BPT285: | Fine Red Earthenware: Mid 16 th –19 th century. 2 sherds, 38g. |

In addition, 16 sherds (152g) of modern earthenware flowerpots were noted, along with a single sherd (5g) of Romano-British Oxford Red-Slipped Ware, fabric OXRS in the National Roman Fabric Reference Collection (Tomber and Dore 1998), and of 3rd–4th century date. All the wares are common finds in the region. Most are in reasonably good condition, other than slight abrasion which is commensurate with their level of stratification. A single fragment of bottle glass and modern roof tile was also noted.

Clay pipe

A total of 12 fragments of pipe stem and one bowl fragment weighing 41g were recovered from context 101.

Environmental data

A total of six fragments of animal bone weighing 75g were recovered from context 101.

Palaeo-environmental evidence

None of the deposits exposed during the excavation proved suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling.

DISCUSSION

Despite the absence of any firm dating evidence excavation in 2015 recorded the characteristic remains of the Via Julia passing through the site confirming the projected road alignment taken from cartographic sources (OS 1885) and evidence derived from previous investigative work. Two deposits comprising a single deposit of stones (context 104) and the exposed smooth surface of the limestone bedrock (context 102) were interpreted as the remains of the Roman road which runs across the Down.

The area of excavation was defined by the limit of the development and comprised an area measuring only 7 x 12m. As a result the investigation was not extensive enough to reveal the road in its entirety including roadside ditches. However, given the north-west, south-east alignment of the projected road in relation to the location of the excavation, it could be expected that at least one side (the south-east side) would be exposed. In the event evidence of significant truncation within both the east and north sides of the excavation attributed to construction of the former house (Redwood) and swimming pool, with also some root disturbance in the central area, has showed that little of the road deposit has survived within the area of investigation.

What could be interpreted as the remains of physically deposited road material was an undated stone spread (context 104) recorded in the south-eastern corner of the excavation surviving as a small isolated layer of variously sized and shaped closely laid stones; their rounded/worn nature pointing to sustained wear/erosion. These were set within the subsoil layer (context 105) a thin relict deposit of reddish-brown clay overlying the natural bedrock. A similar stratigraphic sequence was recorded within road excavations to the south-east in 1899 and 2001 where deposits comprised a layer of stones set within a thin layer of light brown clay which in turn sealed the natural rock.

The presence of a few occasional small worn stones overlying context 105 situated on the downward slope in the area between Context 102 and the swimming pool suggests the road deposit (context 104) may have continued to the north-west, but significant truncation resulting from the swimming pool construction in the late 1960s/early 1970s has removed almost any trace of this.

Recorded in the south-western quarter of the excavation area was an exposed and weathered area of natural bedrock (context 102) which due to its smooth nature was seemingly utilised as a road surface. The relict subsoil layer (context 105) and road deposit (context 104) tapered off towards the centre of

the excavation and at the south-east edge of context 102. The unevenness of the north-west sloping rock stratum (context 107) that was revealed beneath context (layer) 105 in the remainder of the excavation was less pronounced within the area of context 102. Initially it was thought that stones had been carefully laid in a north-westerly direction, but excavation showed that the smooth and rounded nature of the stones was due more to erosion of the exposed rock.

In the area of the stone deposit (context 104) the surface was relatively flat, but towards the north-west along the surface of 102 the natural topography slopes down to the north-west. The subsequent deposition of context 101 was to reduce this slope by increasing the ground level to the north and south-west creating a level surface. The abundance of residual finds from this layer which range in date from the Roman to modern periods and the similarity in colour to the subsoil layer (context 105) suggests it has been re-deposited from elsewhere and is probably associated with landscaping during construction of the adjacent Chattenden House in the late 19th century when the site formed part of the extensive gardens.

The watching brief revealed a continuation of the limestone stratum (context 107) and the relict subsoil layer (context 105), but no further evidence of the road deposit (context 104) was observed within or along the north-west edge of the site where road deposits could be expected to survive in the trench sections. The only find was a single stratified sherd of medieval pottery from context 105.

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