

# Jacob's Well, Featherbed Lane, Oldbury-on-Severn, South Gloucestershire

Report on Archaeological Watching Brief

Application Ref. PT16/3466/F  
BRSMG 2017/



By Rachel Heaton BSc

**Avon Archaeology Limited**  
Bristol: October 2017





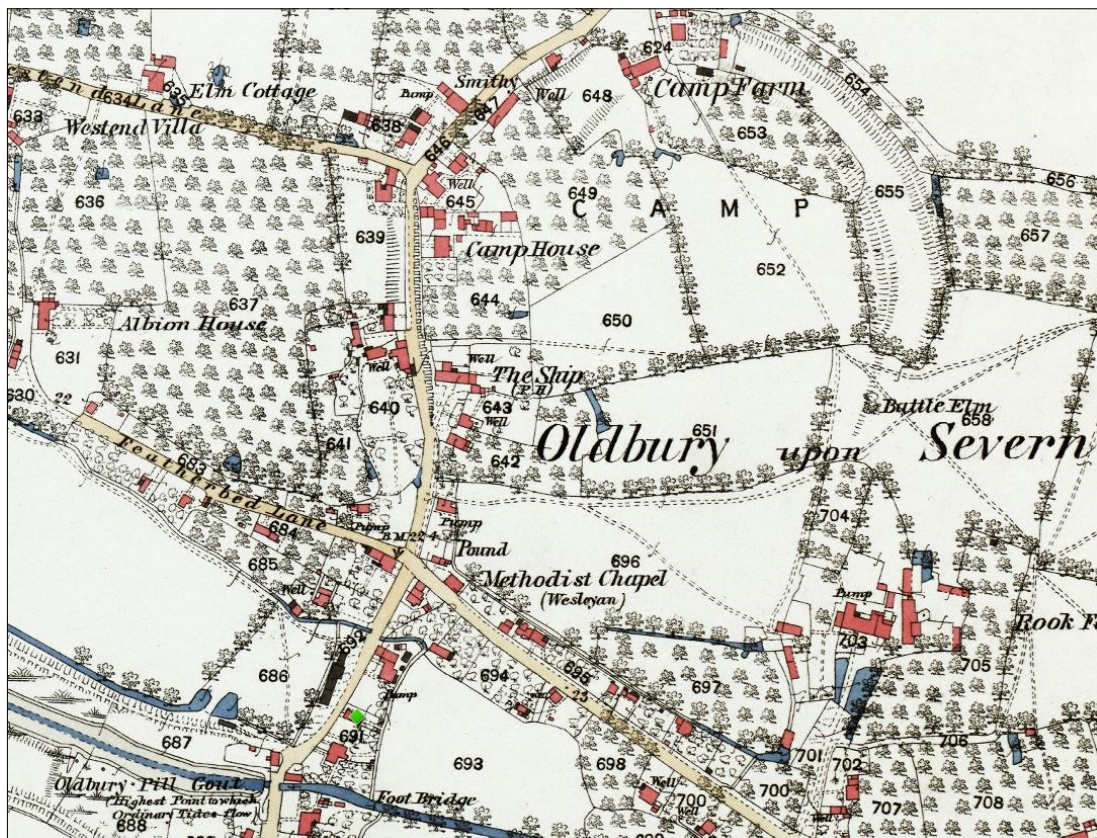
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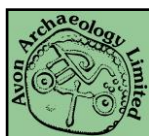
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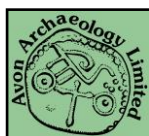
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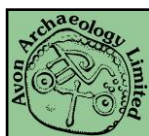
## Abstract

*Avon Archaeology Limited were commissioned to undertake a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording (Archaeological Watching Brief) during groundworks associated with the construction of an extension to the north west side of the existing building known as 'Jacobs Well' on Featherbed Lane, Oldbury-on-Severn. A smaller extension to provide an entrance hall on the south eastern side of the building was included as part of the development, which ultimately aims to modernise and expand the current living space.*

*The historic parish of Oldbury contains within it a multi-period, archaeological resource of considerable and proven significance, most of it related to the alluvial flats of the Severn Estuary littoral which extend west and north of Oldbury village. At present the village is not subject to Conservation Area status, though almost all of its northern half lies within the boundary of a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Oldbury Camp, also known as The Toot or Toots, is an Iron Age settlement which covers about 10 acres and incorporates an area extending east of the study site, roughly in the shape of an inverted 'D'. It is extremely important to stress that the scheduled area represents only the minimum extent of the actual monument, the full area of which is unknown, but which, almost certainly, extends beyond, and perhaps well beyond, the formally protected area.*

*The site itself is located on very flat land that had been prone to flooding prior to modern changes made to alleviate that risk. Flooding over the course of millennia has led to the build-up of alluvial deposits which are both extensive and potentially very deep, running in places into many metres, and both containing and sealing deposits and features of considerable archaeological significance.*

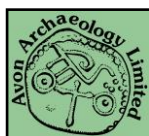
*As Oldbury has presented a rich archaeological resource during previous village developments, a condition for archaeological monitoring was imposed by the Local Authority Archaeologist to preserve any archaeological features or artefacts which might be uncovered and lost during this project.*





*Not a single archaeological feature or deposit was recorded during the watching brief, with only several modern features exposed, including service trenches and footings for a small porch that had been removed prior to the new development. Below topsoil, a narrow band of material described as a subsoil, sealed a completely sterile deposit, which was recorded to the base of the foundation trench, a depth of 1m.*

*The archaeological monitoring took place in September 2017 and was overseen by the writer of this report, Rachel Heaton of Avon Archaeology Limited.*



## Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Mr Jennings and the team for their patience during the monitoring work, and also to Mrs Jennings providing a much appreciated supply of tea!

## Notes

Whereas Avon Archaeology Limited has taken all care to produce a comprehensive summary of the known and recorded archaeological evidence, no responsibility can be accepted for any omissions of fact or opinion, however caused.

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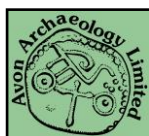
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## Abbreviations

AAL	Avon Archaeology Limited
aOD	Above Ordnance Datum
HER	Historic Environment Record
NGR	National Grid Reference
OASIS	Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations
WSI	Written Scheme of Investigation





## 1 Introduction

Avon Archaeology Limited were commissioned by Mr Chris Jennings to undertake a programme of archaeological monitoring (Archaeological Watching Brief) at Jacob's Well, Featherbed Lane, Oldbury-On-Severn in South Gloucestershire.

Jacob's Well is a small cottage of early 19<sup>th</sup> century date which occupies a linear parcel of land located alongside a rhyne which feeds into the River Severn. The site is centred on OS NGR ST 66039 82214 (**Figure 1**), to the west of the Iron Age settlement known as Oldbury Camp.

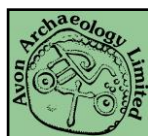
The archaeological element arose as the result of a condition of the planning application, Reference PT16/5176/F set out by the local authority, which required all groundworks associated with the project to be monitored. The project consisted of extensions to both the north-west side and the south-east side of the cottage. The development on the north east side was the larger of the two (approximately 20m<sup>2</sup>) and would provide greater living space at both ground and first floor levels. A much smaller extension of 3.75m<sup>2</sup> on the opposite side of the cottage would provide a formal entrance or porch area for the building.

A WSI was subsequently written (Corcos 2017), and approved by the South Gloucestershire Archaeological Officer, Paul Driscoll. Archaeological monitoring took place on the 7<sup>th</sup> of September 2017. Rachel Heaton of Avon Archaeology Ltd managed the project and was in attendance during the groundworks.

The archive for this project will be deposited with the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, and an accession number has been requested but is yet to be provided.

## 2 Site Location, Topography and Geology

Jacob's Well house is located on the south side of Featherbed Lane, which extends east from the centre of Oldbury on Severn, a village on the eastern side of the Severn Estuary which lies just short of 1km away to the west.



The course of Featherbed Lane is relatively level, and in terms of its topography, the site takes its cue from the roadway, its approximate elevation being bracketed by two spot heights on the road surface, of 6.2m aOD at the western end of Featherbed Lane, and 6.7m aOD not far from its eastern end, where it conjoins with the main village crossroads. Overall the distance between the two heights is about 220m.

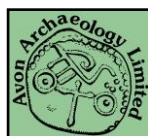
As might perhaps be expected from its position just under 1km to the east of the modern, eastern shoreline of the Severn estuary, geologically, the site lies upon Quaternary drift deposits of estuarine alluvium, of unknown thickness, which in turn rest upon hard rock geology represented by the Triassic Mercia Mudstone series. This is a highly varied deposit, the physical characteristics of which are described by the BGS as

Dominantly red, less commonly green-grey, mudstones and subordinate siltstones with thick halite-bearing units in some basinal areas. Thin beds of gypsum/anhydrite widespread; sandstones are also present BGS.

These are very widespread strata and have also been recorded to great depths – in excess of 1.35km in places. It is also important to note however that, thanks to many years of accumulated fieldwork and other research, the alluvial deposits on either side of the estuary are now known to represent a very significant archaeological resource in their own right, having regularly produced sites and finds, and indeed entire buried landscapes, of not only national but also international importance (Crowther and Dickson 2008; Rippon 2006).

### 3 Archaeological and Historical Background

Historically, the site appears always to have lain within the parish of Oldbury, and on the western side of the village. Contrary to the South Glos. HER (record 13952), the place-name Oldbury is completely unrelated to the name of the saint to whom Oldbury church is dedicated. It is simply *ealdan byrig*, 'the old fortified place', a clear and unequivocal reference to the Iron Age defended enclosure of Oldbury Toot



(Smith 1964, 8). Featherbed Lane appears first to be identified by that name on the First Edition OS map of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it was certainly in existence at least half a century earlier, being depicted on the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century tithe map of Oldbury parish. The origin of the name is unknown, and it is likely to be of relatively modern date (ie second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) since it is not among those historic Oldbury toponyms described by Smith (1964, 8-10).

There was a house on the site of Jacob's Well itself before the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, since it too appears on the Oldbury tithe map, although in a rather different configuration both to the present building and indeed to that shown on the First Edition OS map. It is always perfectly possible that elements of an original building have been demolished, rebuilt, or otherwise altered; it is highly likely, however, that the main part of the structure depicted on the tithe map, with a wing running south-west/north-east, is preserved embedded in the present house, which has probably been progressively extended since that time. The original house is likely to have been of at least early 19<sup>th</sup> century origin. Reference to the Oldbury tithe map and the First Edition OS map, also indicates that the plot boundaries relating to Jacob's Well underwent a change in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the present south-eastern boundary being established at some point in the period between the two maps.

The South Gloucestershire online HER (KnowYourPlace), shows no known archaeological sites, features or listed buildings anywhere near to Jacob's Well, the nearest being a cluster around the main village crossroads, 160m to the east. It is, however, notable how many of the houses which straggle along both sides of Featherbed Lane, *including* Jacob's Well itself, are oriented with their gable ends fronting onto the road, and with relatively narrow, long gardens extending out from their front or rear elevations. This is usually a classic indication of the carving out, in-taking and colonising of roadside plots for the establishment of low-status houses on common, marginal or so-called waste land, much of it strictly against local by- or manorial laws. This is sometimes called 'squatter' settlement, and more permanent houses which survive to the present day were often preceded by ephemeral, poorly-built, largely timber dwellings erected quickly merely to establish a right of occupancy



on the site, perhaps accompanied by payment of a fine to the landowner through the manorial court.

## **4 Aims and Methodology**

### **4.1 Aims**

The aims of the archaeological Watching Brief were:

- To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the site
- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological features encountered
- To determine the extent of previous truncations of any archaeological deposits
- To enable the archaeological officer at South Gloucestershire Council to make an informed decision on the basis of the results of the monitoring, of the extent and condition of any archaeology revealed, and if necessary to add any requirements for further work in order to satisfy the planning conditions
- To make available to all interested parties the results of the investigation.

### **4.2 Methodology**

The work was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (Corcos, 2017) previously approved by the South Gloucestershire Council Archaeological Officer, Paul Driscoll.

Excavation was carried out by the contractor, using a mini 360° tracked mechanical excavator with grading bucket, under the supervision of an archaeologist.

A written, drawn, and photographic record of all significant archaeological deposits will be compiled, to include:

- A pro-forma context-based record for each stratigraphic unit



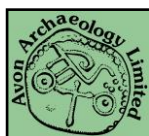
- Plans of each area excavated showing: the extent of the area (tied into the Ordnance Survey National Grid and located on a digital CAD based mapping, incorporating spatial data of a type that can be integrated into the local authority HER), the extent of all significant stratigraphic units, and appropriate detail within stratigraphic units. Overall site plans will be at a scale of 1:100; plans of stratigraphic units usually are at 1:20 scale.
- Sections or profiles (at a scale of 1:10 in areas of detailed excavation) will be drawn of all significant stratigraphic units, and related in level to the Ordnance Datum.
- A digital colour photographic record of all significant stratigraphic units will be compiled in addition to a representative photographic record of the progress and circumstances of the archaeological work.

## 5 The Monitoring

The archaeological watching brief was in place to monitor the groundworks associated with building an extension to the cottage known as Jacob's Well. As mentioned above there were two areas either side of the house where groundworks were required for footings. The larger of the two elements was undertaken first. The foundation trenches were excavated to a depth of 1m below current ground surface.

The top of a sterile, firm light brown grey silty clay, context (108) was reached within 0.3m below the modern ground surface. Becoming slightly paler with depth, it was otherwise consistent to the base of the excavated foundation trench. It was sealed by a band of probable subsoil; context (102) a friable, light yellow grey clay silt deposit which was cut by a number of modern features. Topsoil of 0.15m thick, context (101) seals the subsoil where it survives.

At the southern end of the development area, topsoil was replaced by modern patio surface with underlying stone chippings, context (108).



The centre of the development area is cut by the concrete footings of a former entrance porch, context (106). The porch which had recently been demolished was originally built in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and was not an original feature of the cottage.

In addition to these features, the northern part of the development area was disturbed by modern services. Directly adjacent to the house was the location of a small manhole and drainage pipe as well as a broad shallow cut, context (105) which contained three cables. The cut was filled with a soft, dark brown sandy silt, context (104) which contained occasional small stones. Retrieved from the 104, which was identified as Westervald ware, more commonly known as German Stoneware. This type of pottery was common in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, but as it was found within a modern feature, it can only be described as a residual find. The ground proved to be archeologically sterile, and taking into consideration the limited proposed disturbance of the porch area, it was decided that it was not necessary to return to monitor that part of the project.

#### Table of contexts

Context	Type	Description
100	Topsoil	Dark brown soft sandy silt, fairly humic containing occasional small pebbles. 0.15m thick
101	Subsoil	Friable, light yellow grey clay silt deposit, sealed between topsoil (100) and natural (107). It is cut by a number of modern features. 0.15m thick
102	Fill	The bottom 0.25m consists of concrete, to form a foundation on which to build, the rest of the cut has been backfilled with a redeposited natural containing very occasional lenses of darker coloured gritty material. 0.3 wide by 0.9m
103	Cut	Vertical cut seen in section of trench 0.3m wide of existing building. Represents foundation cut. Filled by (102) 0.3m wide, 0.9m depth
104	Fill	Soft, dark brown sandy silt, contains occasional small stones. It also contained a number of services, including cables and pipework. A single sherd of Westerwald (German Stoneware) was retrieved from this deposit: it was clearly residual.
105	Cut	Linear cut, with vertical side and flattish base, cuts both (101) and (107). Dug in the latter part of the 20 <sup>th</sup> century for the installation of services which remain in use.
106	Structure	Remains of concrete foundations belonging to the former entrance porch. The structure cuts the natural 107.
107	Natural	Firm light brown grey silty clay, becomes slightly paler with depth, and contains no inclusions, completely sterile. Formed over thousands of years of alluviation.
108	Surface	Patio (slabs with under-laying stone chippings), replaced topsoil at the south-west end of the foundation trenches.

## 7 Conclusions

The watching brief project at Jacob's Well, revealed nothing to enhance the proven archaeological resource of Oldbury-on-Severn.

A cottage is known to have occupied the site since the early part of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, as it is shown on the tithe map. No features or deposits relating to the construction of the building or any evidence of earlier structures were observed. A matrix of sterile deposits, truncated only by modern features, was recorded. A single sherd of pottery dating to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century was recovered from the fill of a modern service trench, and was interpreted as residual.

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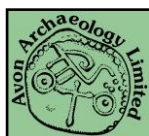
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## **KnowYourPlace online heritage resource (South Glos)**

<http://maps.bristol.gov.uk/kyp/?edition=southglos>



Figure 1

Location of the site

The Site 

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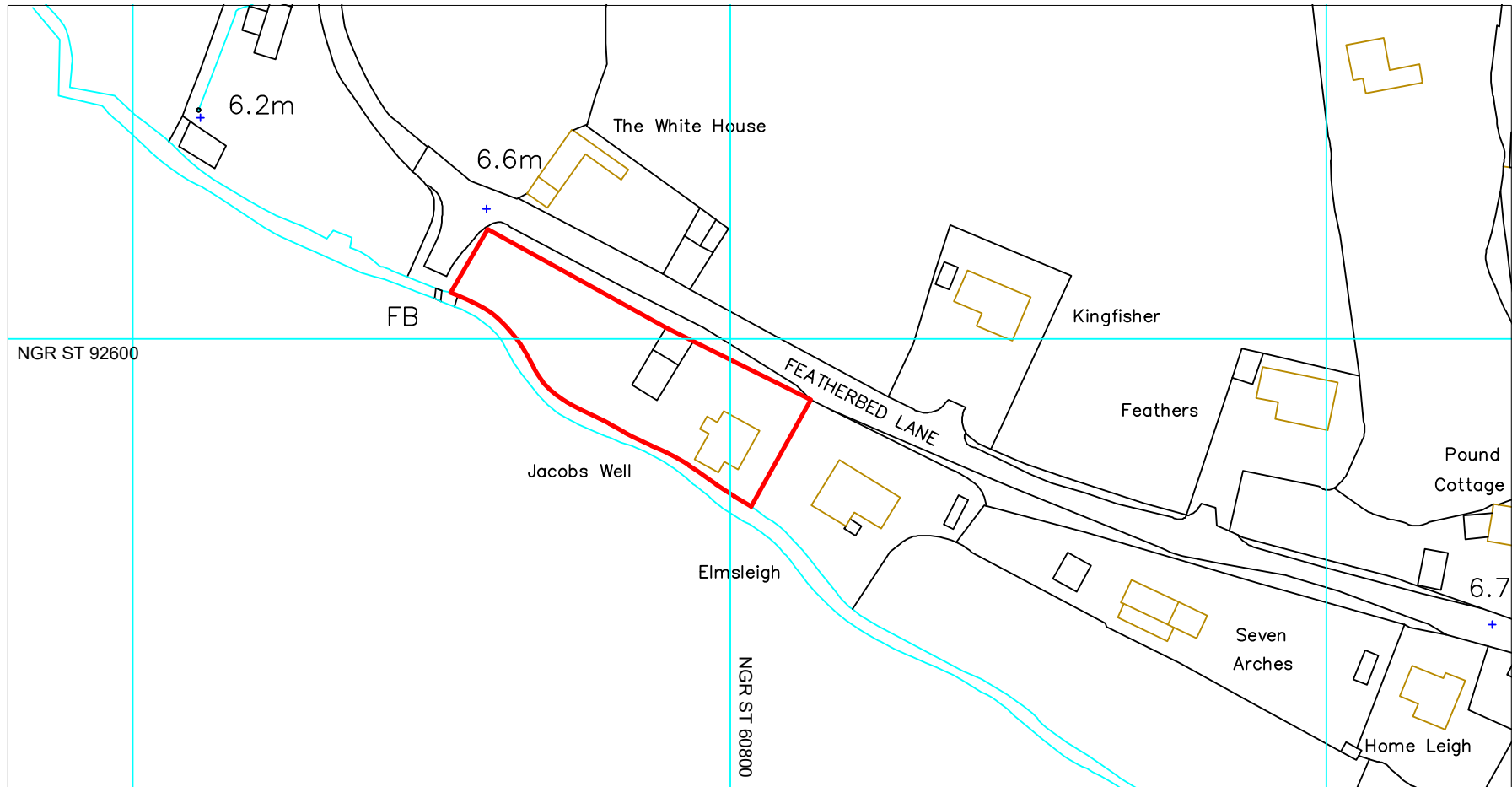
Grid at 1km intervals

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Figure 2

Site plan with red line boundary







**Plate 1**  
General view to north-east of foundation trenches.



**Plate 2**  
General view to north-west showing a number of service cables extending from the section. The cables are within a shallow trench which cuts a natural subsoil layer.



**Plate 3**  
General view of the foundation trenches looking east.



**Plate 4**  
North-east facing section of a foundation trench, excavated alongside an existing patio. A drainage pipe is visible surrounded by a single, sterile, natural deposit.



**Plate 5**  
Photo shows the exposed concrete footings of the entrance porch which was recently removed to make way for the new extension.