Land to the Rear of "Lynton" and "Roman Orchard", Wells Road, Radstock, Bath and North-East Somerset

Report on Archaeological Watching Brief

B&NES Council Planning Reference 13/05520/FUL

NGR ST 67664 54394

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On Behalf of Elan Homes Ltd

Avon Archaeology Limited
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ABSTRACT

Avon Archaeology Limited were commissioned by Mr Gareth Davies of Elan Homes Limited to undertake a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording (Archaeological Watching Brief) during groundworks related to the development of three new detached dwelling houses on land to the rear of two existing houses, called ‘Lynton’ and ‘Roman Orchard’, located at Wells Road, Westfield, Radstock, Bath and North-East Somerset. The site is centred on NGR ST 67664 54394. The project was commissioned to satisfy a condition of planning consent, imposed by the Archaeological Officer for B&NES, which required that groundworks related to the proposed development should be recorded in accordance with guidelines for Watching Brief projects issued by The Institute for Archaeology (IfA), the guidelines for archaeological projects set out in MoRPHE (Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment) and the standard procedures of Avon Archaeology Limited. Groundworks related to the development were contained within an area of just over 0.20ha, and were carried out over the course of several days in late October and early November, 2014.

The results of the watching brief were entirely negative, and at no point during either extensive topsoil stripping, the excavation of a foundation footing for a boundary wall, and of the foundation trenches for one of the houses, did it prove possible to identify any features, structures or deposits of any archaeological interest whatsoever. This being so, the monitoring was curtailed to exclude the foundation trenches for two of the three houses, it having been judged after due consideration that the site was effectively sterile as far as archaeology was concerned.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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NOTES

Whereas Avon Archaeology Limited have 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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ABBREVIATIONS

AAL	Avon Archaeology Ltd
aOD	Above Ordnance Datum
CBM	Ceramic Building Material
HER	Historic Environment Record
NGR	National Grid Reference
SRO	Somerset Record Office

1 INTRODUCTION

Avon Archaeology Limited were commissioned by Mr Gareth Davies of Elan Homes Limited to undertake a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording (Archaeological Watching Brief) during groundworks related to the development of three new detached dwelling houses on land to the rear of two existing houses, called 'Lynton' and 'Roman Orchard', located at Wells Road, Westfield, Radstock, Bath and North-East Somerset. The site is centred on NGR ST 67664 54394. The project was commissioned to satisfy a condition of planning consent, imposed by the Archaeological Officer for B&NES, which required that groundworks related to the proposed development should be recorded in accordance with guidelines for Watching Brief projects issued by The Institute for Archaeology (IfA), the guidelines for archaeological projects set out in MoRPHE (Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment) and the standard procedures of Avon Archaeology Limited. Groundworks related to the development were contained within an area of about 2,156m² (**Figures 1, 2, 3** and **4**), and were carried out over the course of several days in late October and early November, 2014. The main part of the site, occupying former gardens of houses fronting onto Wells Road, is of irregular, elongated shape, with its long axis oriented south-west/north-east. The site is just under 100m in length at its longest point, and just under 30m in width at its widest.

A digital photographic record was made as the work progressed, and a sample of those images is presented here on the **Cover** of this report, and as **Plates 1** to **13**. The monitoring work itself focussed on topsoil stripping in both the main part of the site, and two much smaller areas related to new driveways for two large, pre-existing detached houses close by to the east, excavation of foundation footings for a boundary wall, and excavation of foundation footings for the three new houses themselves.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

Geologically, this site is underlain by deposits of the Blue Lias, which straddles the transition between the Triassic and Jurassic periods, about 204 to 190 million years ago. In terms of its physical nature, this is a highly variable group, but in many areas its fundamental constituents are limestones interbedded with stiff, khaki or buff coloured clays. This is precisely the lithology that was encountered on the site (for an example see **Plate 11**). There is, however, a major geological boundary very close by to the north of the site, where rather older deposits of the Triassic Mercia Mudstone Group outcrop, and indeed form the valley flanks sloping away to the north and the bottom of which is shared by the Rivers Somer and Wellow. This lithology represents an extremely widespread and rather mixed sequence of calcarious clays,

mudstones, sandstones and siltstones, and attaining thicknesses in places of over 1,350m. These deposits were being laid down throughout pretty much the entire Triassic Period (BGS).

In terms of topography, the site itself is effectively level, with elevations centring around 118m aOD, and just under, recorded throughout. There is a very slight, localised rise towards the south-western end of the site, where heights of just over 119m aOD occur in the vicinity of the House 3 plot, but the overall effect is negligible.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

This site was called in by the local authority for a watching brief level of archaeological monitoring because of its proximity to a major routeway of Romano-British date, namely the Fosse Way road, the south-eastern side of which forms the entire length of the site's north-western boundary, running south-west/north-east.

Because of its importance, the B&NES HER allots separate numbers along the length of the road as it passes through the B&NES area, and in Midsomer Norton-Radstock the relevant numbers are MBN1153 and MBN5977[1]. The line of the road as it relates to the present site now takes the form of a narrow, gravelled trackway, turning to only a footpath rather further to the north-east, just under 50m beyond the north-western corner of the site[2]. There have been surprisingly few modern archaeological interventions actually across the line of the Roman road, although the HER reports some antiquarian work at unknown locations. The fully online Somerset HER helpfully lists all the known commercial work relating to the road under a single Primary Record Number of 55101, although again, few of the records included under that heading seem to have involved specific fieldwork on the actual road itself. However, one project that did, although oddly *not* included with 55101, is reported under PRN 17303. This involved an excavation in 2004 on a site next to the Fosse at Shepton Mallet, which built on the much wider campaign of archaeological work at the known, and very extensive Romano-British roadside settlement at Shepton[3]. The HER notes that

> The western perimeter of the Roman Fosse Way road was…..examined. The road consisted of at least three separate surfaces. The earliest was of sandstone originating from Beacon Hill on Mendip, and is the earliest structure identified on

[1]Specifically, MBN1153 covers the line of the road from Clandown, about 2.5km north-east of Norton church, to Red Post, just over 2km further to the north-east along the road.
[2]The Roman road network in the vicinity of Norton-Radstock was investigated by Tratman, who proposed a number of amendments to the then orthodox views; Tratman 1968.
[3]A large part of this work has since been published as Leach *et al* 2001.

site, the two later were cobbled.

More recently, and very usefully, Peter Davenport has reviewed the archaeological evidence for the Fosse, and other roads, in the area around Bath since 1997 (Davenport 2008). Davenport publishes sections and photographs, perhaps the most spectacular of the latter being his Figures 4 and 5 (*ibid*, 132), part of a record of a section taken across the line of the Fosse at a point a few hundred metres south-west of Clandown. These illustrations dramatically bring home the point that in its best-preserved sections, a major Roman road is a very significant feature in the landscape, of which the central, engineered, raised *agger* itself is only one element in an integrated system of related features, and including of course sometimes extremely substantial roadside ditches, that in total can be many metres wide. The sheer massiveness of the engineering involved, however, can also mean that elements of Roman roads can survive even when heavily truncated by later features (Davies 2002, 53-78); this has, for example, been demonstrated recently by excavations involving a road at Henbury near Bristol (Margary 1973, Road No. 541), the line of which was identified underneath a demolished modern school building (Young 2011). This evidence attests very strongly to the tenacity of these features, and gives us pause that, in the specific case of the line of the Fosse, which marks the north-west boundary of the present site, the narrow unsurfaced trackway which now occupies it, certainly marks only a very small part of a far larger (ie wider) feature, stretching away for several metres on either side of it, and probably including roadside ditches; indeed Bateman herself remarks that

> The whole of the zone alongside this road has good archaeological potential, mainly because of the possibility of Romano-British roadside structures or buildings, but also because features connected to the road itself or its use may survive (Bateman 1999, 9).

In addition, and strongly related to the presence of the road itself, there is always the possibility of roadside settlement, again as spectacularly demonstrated at Shepton Mallet, just over 12km away from the site to the south-west, along the Fosse, and it was for this reason as well that the local authority watching brief condition on the present site was imposed (Leach *et al* 2001).

4 THE MONITORING

The site consisted of, essentially, two parts. By far the larger and more important element consisted of the sites of three new houses, with their associated garages, abutting the south-eastern side of the Fosse Way (**Figure 3**). We will turn to this area shortly. However, outside the

strict limits of the site boundary, close to the entrance into the small cul de sac giving access to the new estate off the Wells Road, two large, detached houses had already been constructed, from historic map evidence at some point before the late 1950s. A small, late addition to the present project involved the stripping of topsoil and some subsoil from limited areas in front (ie immediately to the south-east of) both of these houses for new driveways and parking areas. Following stripping, the exposed surfaces were covered in terram sheeting and then finished off with rolled gravel. The areas involved were 77m² for the house on the north-western side of the access road, and 55m² for the house on its south-western side. Since both of these small areas were strictly *outside* the conditioned, red line boundary area, they are not specifically referred to in the **Figures**. However, both were nonetheless monitored in their entirety. For both areas, the formation level was about 0.30m-0.35m below the modern turf line, and in both, the work removed not only the turf and topsoil, but also the subsoil, revealing the top of the highly weathered and fractured natural Lias limestone clay formation (**Plate 13**). The subsoil on both sides of the access road contained very few finds, but those that did emerge were all modern. At no point during the monitoring of either of these areas were any structures, deposits or features of potential archaeological significance identified.

Topsoil stripping on the main part of the site (virtually the entire area left white on **Figures 2** and **3**) was carried out using a 1.8m toothless bucket on a 360º mechanical excavator, and all of it was monitored. Over the vast majority of the stripped area, the operation revealed only the subsoil, which appeared to contain very few finds, and those were of post-medieval or modern date. Several trees, and their stumps, had to be removed by machine, including one very large one, the removal of which left a large bole (at NGR ST 67666 54441), with a useful section showing the natural, heavily weathered and fractured Lias limestone clay (**Plate 4**). Along the entire length of the north-western side of the site, parallel to, and clearly running underneath the boundary hedge/fence on that side, the ground surface was raised into a locally prominent ridge which on first inspection gave an appearance very like what might be expected of the *agger* of a Roman road. However, somewhat disappointingly, topsoil stripping revealed instead a cinder trackway, clearly modern from the fact that it was cut into the subsoil, and also contained finds such as machine-made glass (**Plates 1, 2, 3, 10** and **11**). It became clear that the site's north-western boundary had moved slightly to the north-west, isolating a strip of the trackway within the gardens behind Lynton and Roman Orchard. It also seems clear that the trackway is historically related to the existence of a limekiln very close to the northern corner of the development site, but on the western side of the Fosse, which first appears on the Second Edition OS map (published 1903 – **Figure 4**). As was standard practice, the kiln was directly associated with a quarry, which is also explicitly identified on this map, but which seems to have gone out of use by the time of the Third Edition map of 1931. During the course of topsoil stripping on the main part of the site, the cinder trackway was traced along virtually the entire

length of the north-western boundary (**Plate 3**). It can confidently be assigned an early 20th century date.

While the topsoil strip was underway on the main part of the site, the opportunity was taken to use the machine to cut three small 'test trenches' at right angles across what proved to be the cinder trackway, but also further to the south-east, intruding into the main area of the former gardens of "Roman Orchard". Their locations are shown on **Figure 3.** This gave full sections through both the trackway and the garden material; and this was reinforced when the north-western foundation footing for House 3, and those for its garage, were excavated (**Plate 10**). Where it could be seen in section, the trackway was between 0.15 and 0.20m in thickness, and consisted of highly compacted cinder material that had clearly been deliberately laid for the purpose of forming a resilient, reasonably hard and well-drained running surface.

The topsoil strip over the main part of the site, which is documented on the **Cover** and **Plate 3,** revealed no indication whatsoever of anything of archaeological interest or significance. In terms of actual foundation footings, the first to be excavated, following successful completion of the topsoil strip, was for the wall which was to form a part of the boundary on the south-eastern side of the site. This was carried out using a 0.60m toothless bucket, and the foundation was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.65m below the modern ground level (ie the pre-existing turf surface). **Plate 5** records this work. Nothing of archaeological interest was identified. The foundations for House 3 were then excavated, the deepest point being at the extreme north-west side where the house wall shared a partially-common foundation with the wall of the attached garage (**Figure 3**). Here, trench depth attained 0.96m below modern ground level. All the trenches for House 3 were monitored, but at no point was anything of archaeological significance revealed, and at this point the monitoring exercise was curtailed.

With the sole exception of the cinder trackway at the north-west side of the site, the sequence of deposits throughout was topsoil and turf, subsoil, and then natural Lias limestone and clay. As already noted, the trackway lay below the modern turf and topsoil, but was cut into the subsoil. Away from the cinder trackway, the House 3 trenches showed that subsoil depth increased markedly from north-west to south-east, and towards the former, there were places where the natural was covered by only a few cm of subsoil following removal of the turf and topsoil, and at the south-eastern ends of trenches 2, 3, 4 and 5, the subsoil extended to virtually the full depth of the trenches, which attained a maximum of 0.80m below the stripped surface of the site, at the south-eastern end of Trench 2. This was the excavation for the south-western end wall of House 3.

A very small corpus of ceramic finds and CBM was recovered, examined and then discarded; all of the material was from either the topsoil or the subsoil, and all was firmly post-medieval or modern in date.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The watching brief reported here was carried out in fulfilment of a condition imposed on a planning application relating to the construction of a small development of three new houses, and associated access road, at Wells Road, Westfield, Radstock, Bath and North-East Somerset. The monitoring exercise took in topsoil stripping of the entire area of the main site, the footing trench for a new boundary wall on the south-eastern side of the development, and the trenches for one of the new houses. In addition, monitoring was undertaken of topsoil stripping of garden areas attached to two *existing* dwellings, outside the strict boundary of the development site, but close by to the east.

The results of the watching brief were entirely negative, and at no point did it prove possible to identify any features, deposits or structures of any archaeological interest whatsoever. This being so, the monitoring was curtailed to exclude the foundation trenches for two of the three houses, it having been judged after due consideration that the site was effectively sterile as far as archaeology was concerned.

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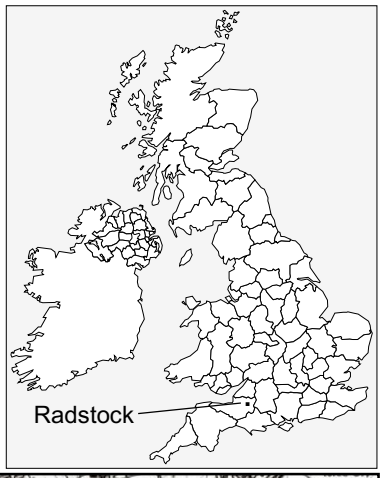
Figure 1

Location of the Study Area

The Site



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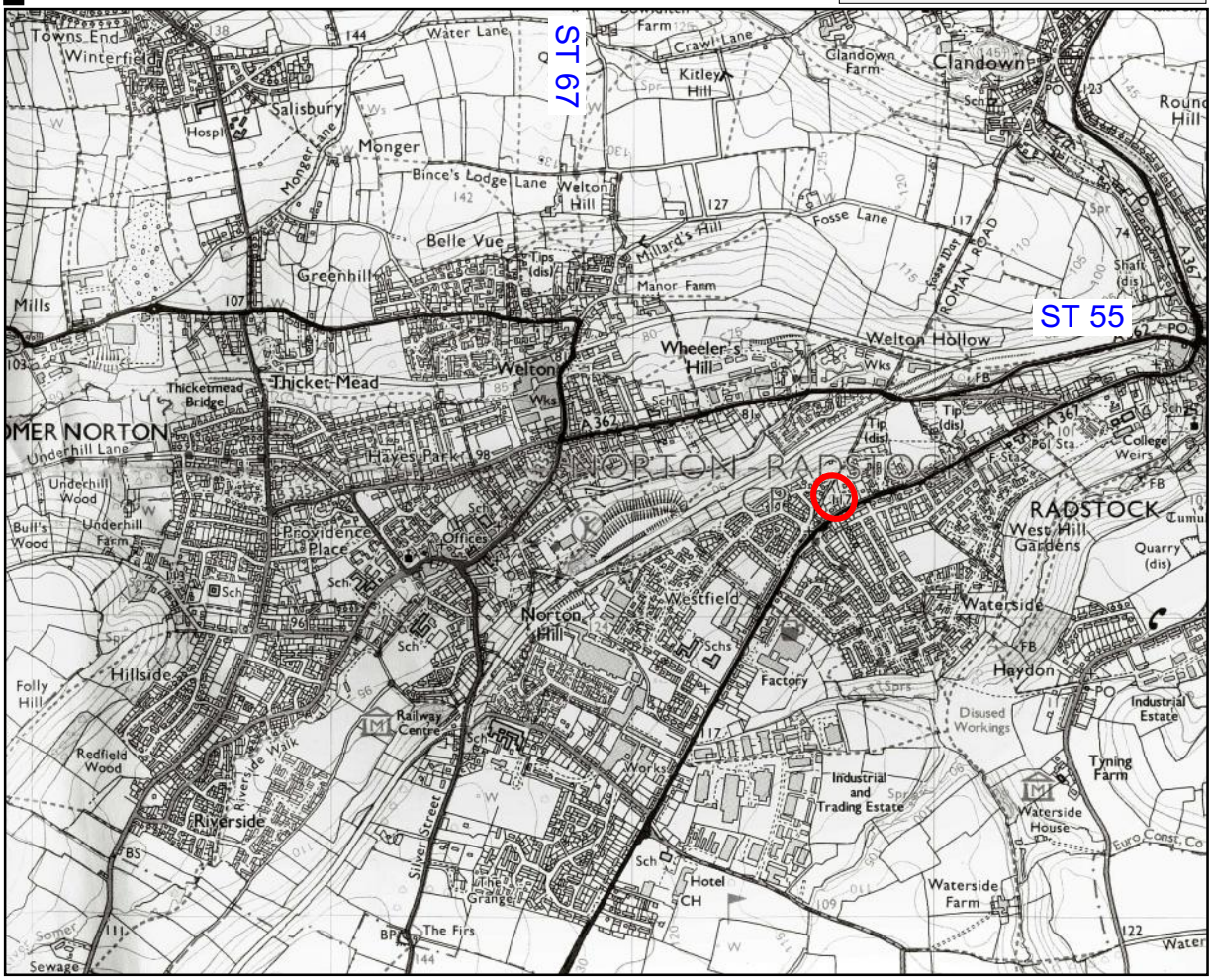

Scale 1:25,000

Figure 2

N

Location of the Study Area outlined in Red.

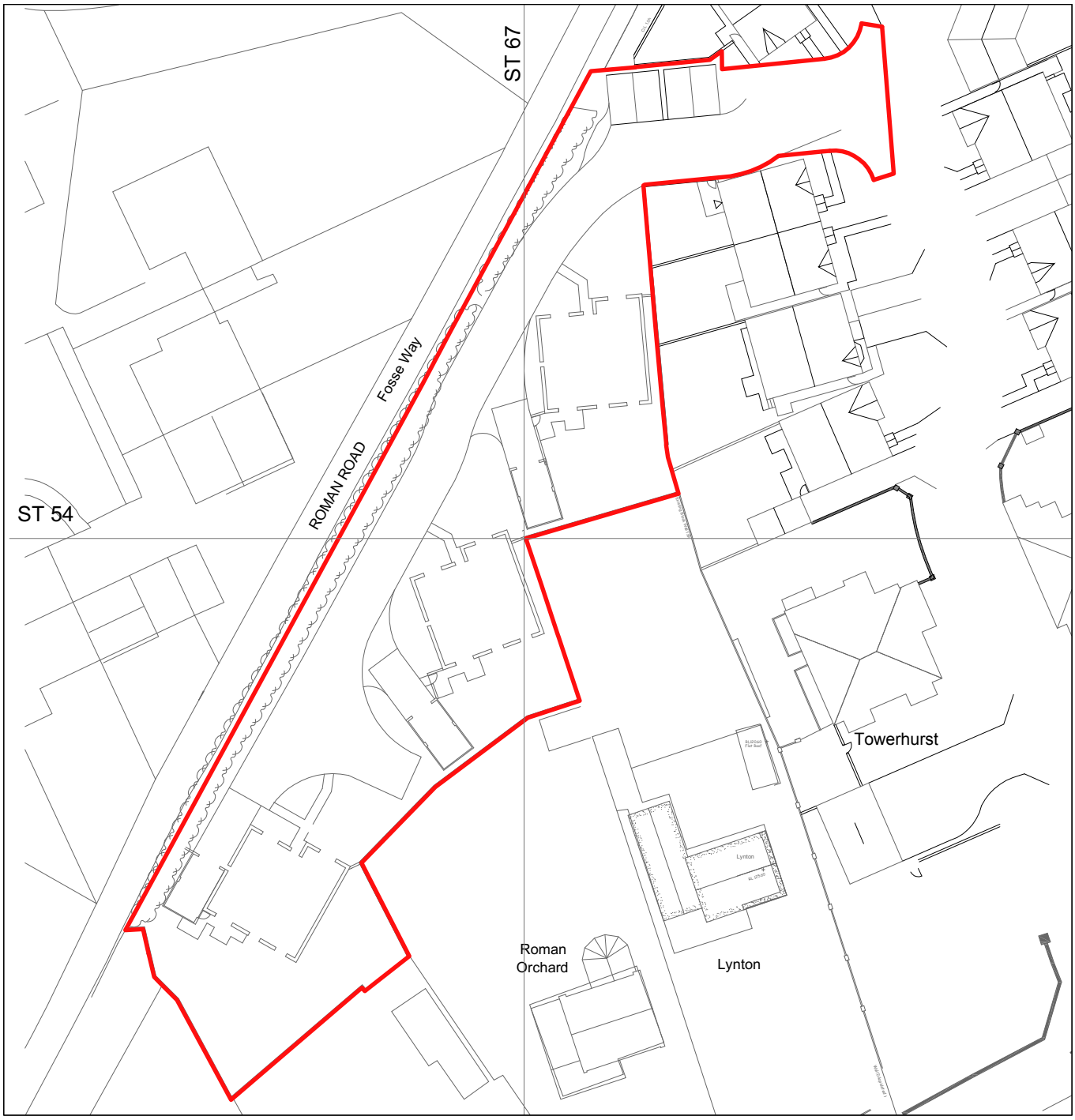

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Figure 3

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Trench location plan in relation to site boundary

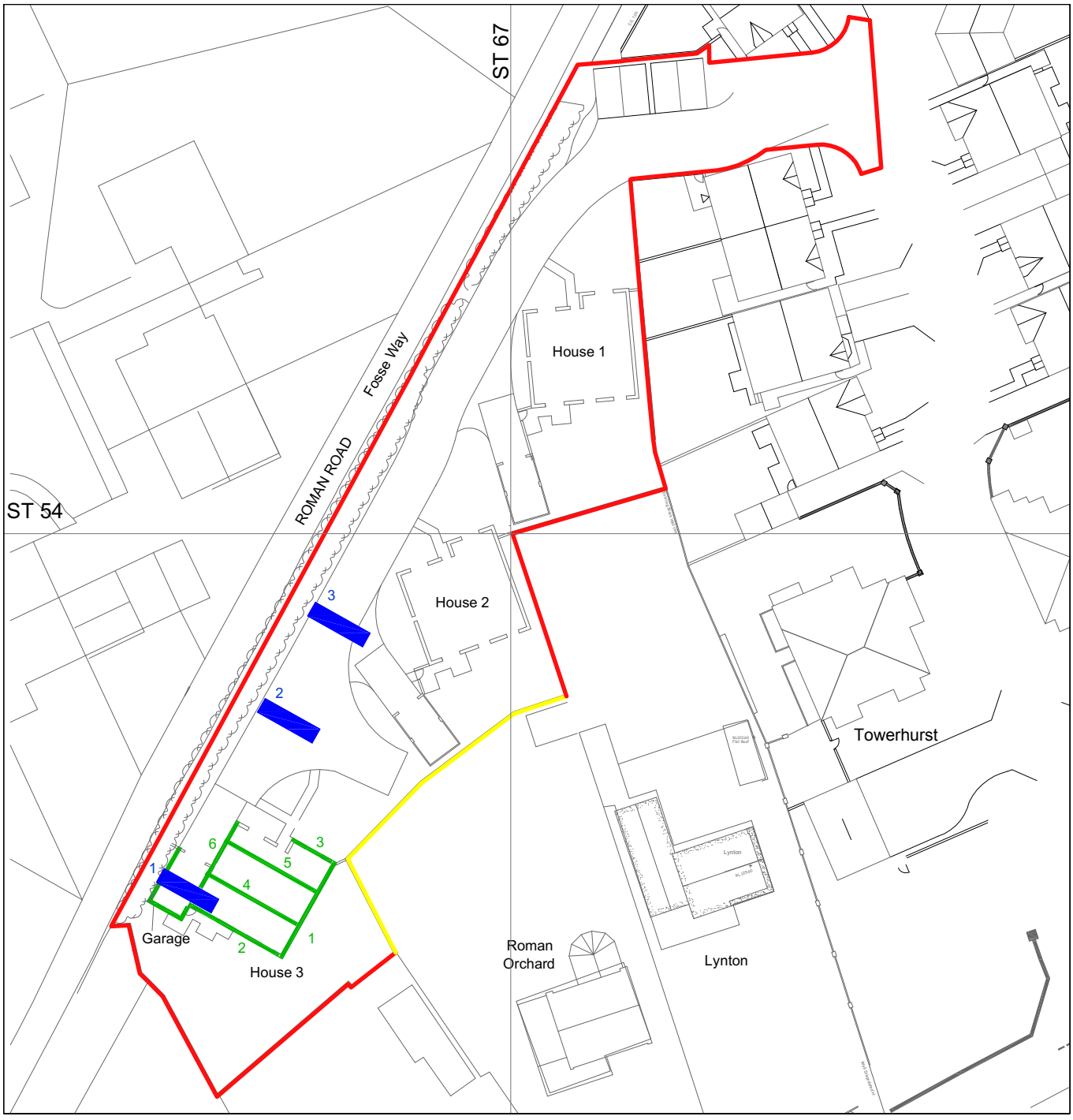

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Figure 4

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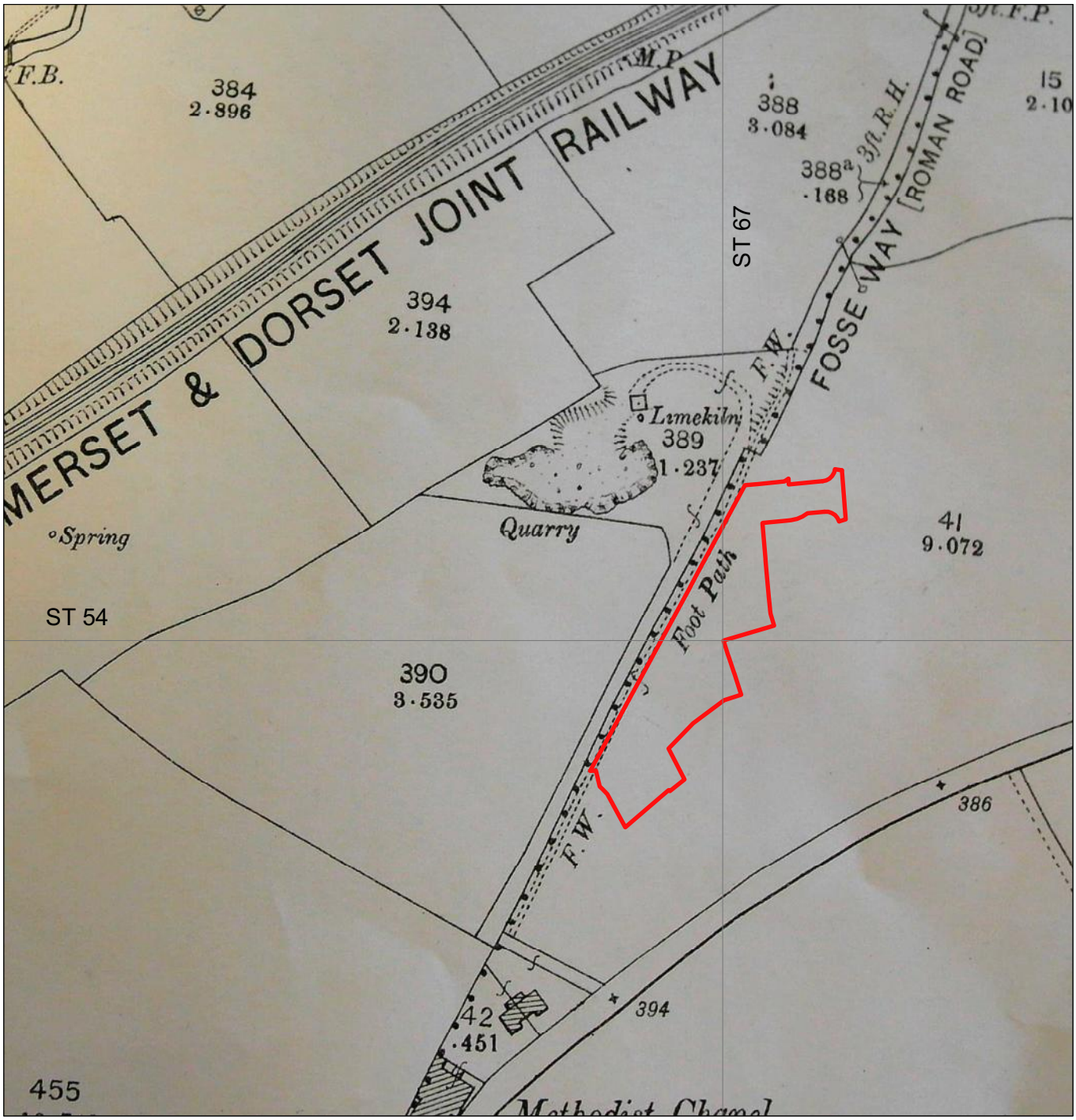
Extract from Second Edition OS 25" map, revised 1902, published 1903. Somerset Sheet 20.14. SRO. Area of development site superimposed andoutlined in red.



Plates

1. The slight ridge running south-west/north-east and marking the site’s north-western boundary, prior to topsoil stripping. The boundary hedge can be seen on the r/h side of the frame. View to south-west.

2. Test Trench 3 (see **Figure 3**), view to north-west from south-east end. Note south-eastern side of probably early 20th century cinder trackway at far end of the trench, cut into the top of the mid-brown subsoil layer. The top of the natural Lias limestone and clay has been revealed in the base of the trench beside the scale. Scale: 1m.

3. Composite panoramic image of the main site, with topsoil stripping complete. The view is from close to the south-west extremity of the site, and pans round from the north-west (l/h side of frame) to north-east (r/h side). Note, on the l/h side, the line of the probably early 20th century cinder trackway running north-east/south-west, along the site’s north-western boundary. It would have originally run underneath the boundary hedge on that side.

4. Using the machine to remove a large tree stump at the north-eastern end of the site, in the middle of the line of the new access road. View to south-west.

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6. North-west facing section in south-eastern boundary wall trench, taken at NGR ST 67665 54404. Trench depth, 0.70m below modern turfline. The section shows turf and topsoil 0.07m thick, subsoil 0.14m thick, and then natural (but weathered) Lias limestone and clay down to the trench base. Scale divisions: 0.20m.

5. Foundation trench for new boundary wall on the south-eastern side of the site nearing completion (see **Figure 3**). View to north-east from close to the south-western end of the trench.

7. Marking out the trench lines for the foundations of House 3, at the extreme south-western end of the site. View to south.

8. Trench 2 of House 3 complete (see **Figure 3**). View to north-west.

9. South-west facing section of Trench 2, taken at NGR ST 67643 54383. Trench depth 0.74m below stripped level. The blue line indicates roughly the way in which the natural Lias limestone and clay begins to dip away to the south-east at this point, underneath a subsoil layer which increases in thickness in that direction. Scale: 1m.

10. Image taken at the point where the south-eastern wall of the garage joins onto the north-western wall of House 3 (see **Figure 3**). View to west. Note the depth of the cinder trackway at this point, and the way that it has almost entirely truncated the subsoil layer in this area, to sit almost directly on top of the heavily weathered natural Lias limestone and

11. Detail of south-east facing section in the north-west foundation trench of the garage attached to House 3. Cinder trackway lying almost directly on top of natural. Scale: 1m.

12. House 3 foundation trenches completed. View to west. In the foreground, concrete has been poured into the foundation trench for the south-eastern boundary wall (see **Figure 3**).

13. Completion of topsoil stripping in the former garden of one of the two pre-existing houses outside the development boundary, at the entrance of the new estate just off Wells Road. The work was carried out to install new driveways in front of both houses, and the image shows that for the westernmost house, shown on **Figure 3** and known as *Towerhurst*. In the background, behind the excavator, the easternmost of the two houses can just be seen, together with the spoilheaps from the stripping of its own garden.