

JCSA11



JESSAMINE COTTAGE, ST MICHAELS, ST ALBANS, HERTFORDSHIRE

Results of an Archaeological Watching Brief

commissioned by Frost Conservatories

5/11/2102 & 5/11/2290LB

April 2012

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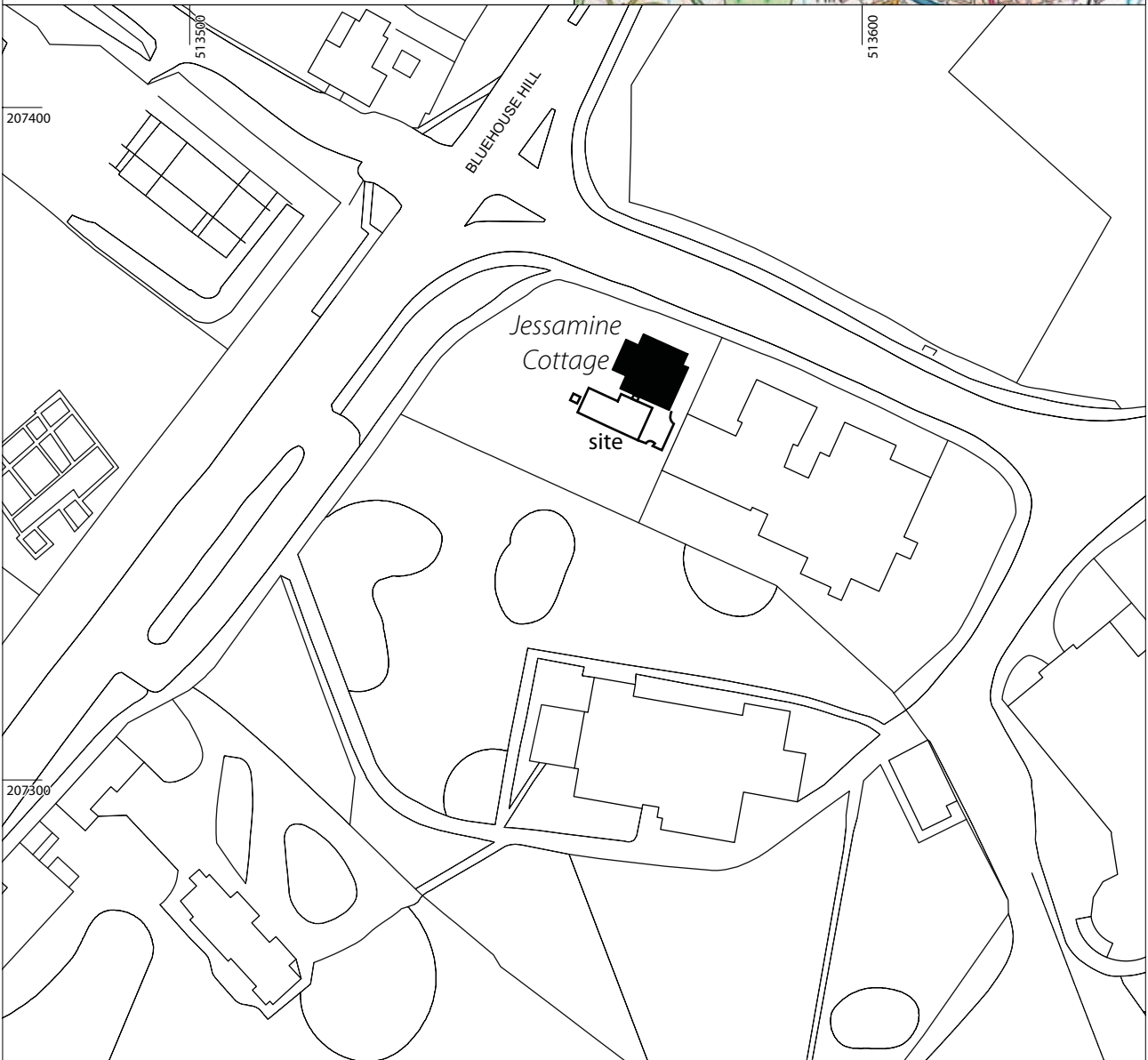
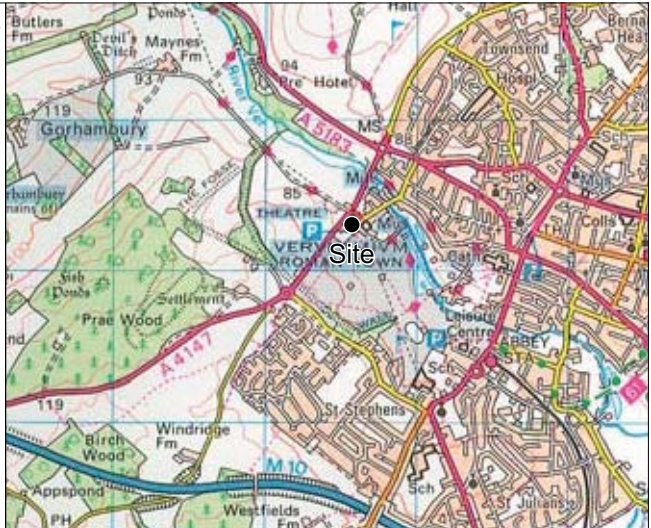
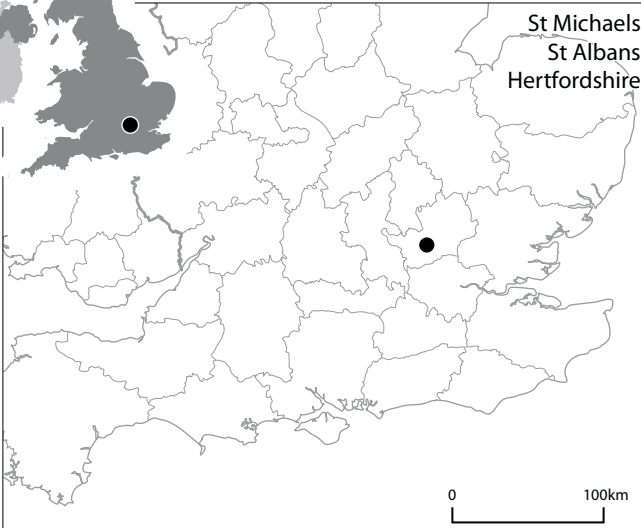
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0 50m

Illus 1

Site location

JESSAMINE COTTAGE, ST MICHAELS, ST ALBANS, HERTFORDSHIRE

Results of an Archaeological Watching Brief

Headland Archaeology Ltd conducted a watching brief at a development site in St Albans, in order to provide further information on any archaeological deposits on the site. The work was commissioned by Frost Conservatories on behalf of the homeowner. The watching brief consisted of machine dug footings and areas of ground reduction. These identified Roman remains from the fourth mixed with post-medieval deposits suggesting that the site had been previously disturbed.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Planning background

The Client is undertaking development works to Jessamine Cottage which comprise a single storey rear extension and erection of a detached green house and associated groundworks (Planning ref: 5/11/2102 & 5/11/2290LB). Because the Development Area (DA) lies within an area of archaeological significance (AS.R. 25), policy 111 of the District plan requires that the development should be subject to a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording of all ground works.

The DA also lies within a Scheduled Ancient Monument (No. 7). English Heritage (EH) and Policy 109 of the District Plan require that Scheduled Monument Consent is granted prior to any works being undertaken.

1.2 Site location and background

The DA is located on the south side of St Michaels Street at Jessamine Cottage, close to the junction with Blue House Hill. The site lies at a height of c.83m AOD around 1.8km west of the centre of modern St Albans (Illus 1). The bedrock geology of the area is Lewes Nodular and Seaford Chalk Formation overlain by superficial deposits of glacial and river terrace gravels.

1.3 Archaeological background

The DA has potential to contain Roman, Saxon and Medieval remains. Indeed, it lies within an Area of

Archaeological Significance (AS.R. 25 – St Albans including Saxon Kingsbury, Saxon and medieval town and Sopwell Nunnery: Policy), and within Scheduled Ancient Monument No. 7 (Verulamium Roman City, Insula XIX).

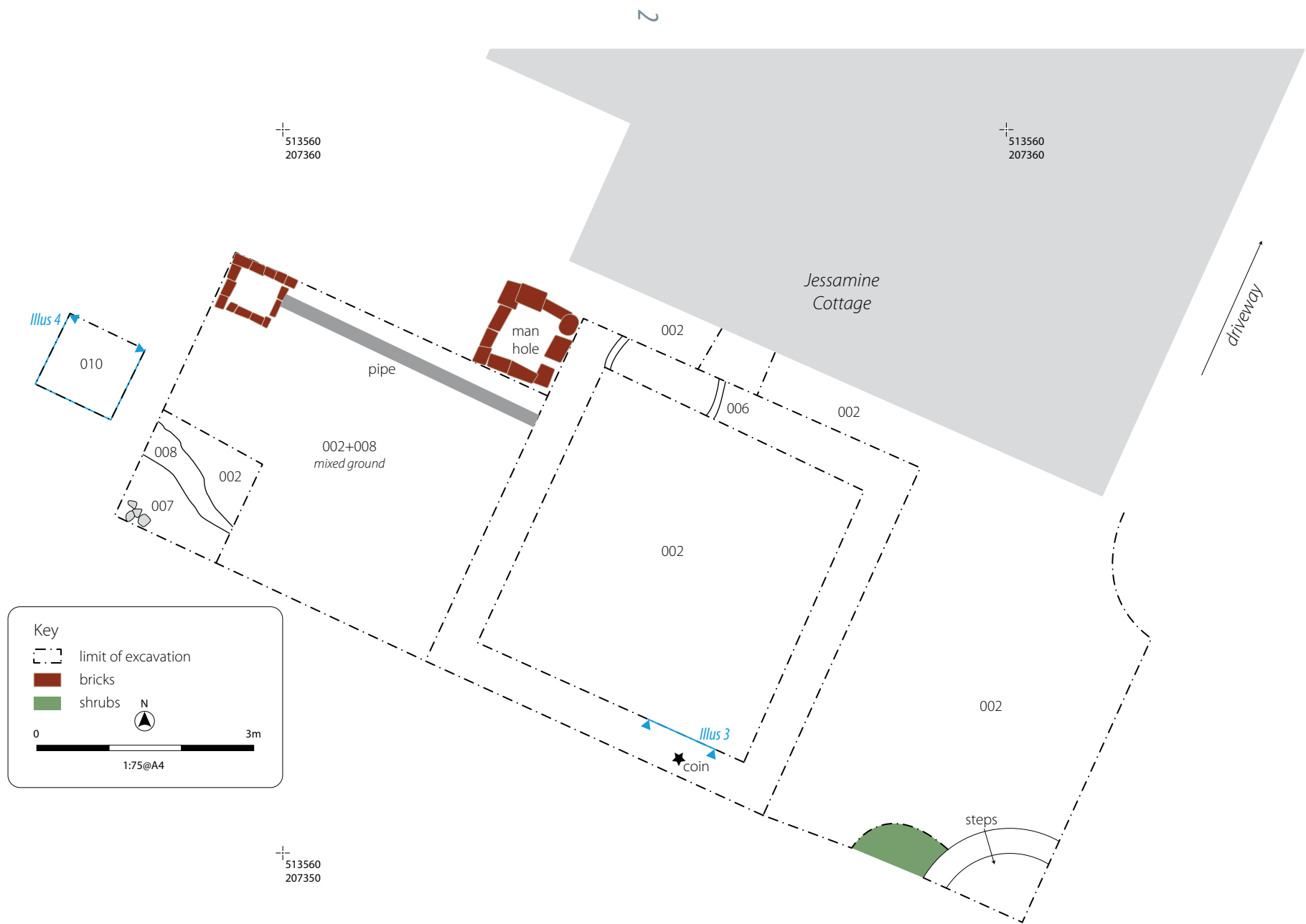
In 1955, the area produced fragments of the Verulamium Basilica inscription which indicated that a Basilica, situated beneath the extant St Michael's Church, was completed in AD79. It is also within the small focus of the later Saxon, medieval and post-medieval occupation centred on the Roman Basilica/Forum and later church and village of St Michaels. Excavations at nearby Six Bells produced evidence for a post-Roman building (UAD Monument 227) including traces of floors, dating roughly to medieval or later, which contained post-Roman tile.

The DA is close to the known site of a Roman building and sits within a wider area of Roman and medieval settlement. Excavations in March 1994 (West 1994) at the front of the property that uncovered evidence of three phases of walls and wall foundations: two of which were robbed masonry walls with possible *in situ* clay floor levels.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Objectives

In general the objectives of the evaluation are presented in the WSI (Headland Archaeology 2011, Section 4).



Illus 2
Site plan



The specific objectives of the evaluation were:

- Ensuring the archaeological monitoring of all aspects of the development programme, including landscaping, likely to have an impact upon archaeological deposits.
- Securing the adequate recording of any archaeological remains revealed by the development programme.
- Securing the analysis, conservation, and long-term storage of any artefactual/ecofactual material recovered from the site.

2.2 Methodology

Fieldwork took place between the 16th and 20th February 2012. Machine dug footings and ground reduction were monitored continuously and all archaeological deposits were recorded. At the time of the investigations only ground reduction and footings for the extension to the cottage were undertaken. Groundworks for the proposed detached greenhouse have not been undertaken and are not covered within this report.

2.3 Recording

All recording was in accordance with the code of practice of the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA). All trenches and contexts were given unique numbers and all recording was undertaken on *pro forma* record cards that conform to accepted archaeological standards. All stratigraphic relationships were recorded.

An overall site plan was drawn at an appropriate scale and tied to the National Grid.

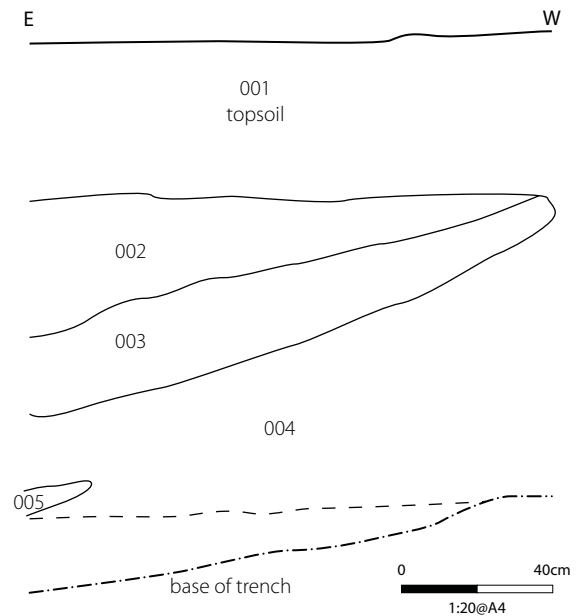
A full photographic record comprising colour slide and black and white print photographs was taken, supplemented with digital photography. A metric scale was clearly visible in record photographs of contexts.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Introduction

Prior to archaeological work the floor of an earlier patio was removed from the location of the building footprint whereupon the excavated footings were dug to the extension footprint under archaeological observation. The exposed footings measured 0.6m wide with depths of up to 2.3m (Illus 2). Natural geology was not reached. A description and thickness of deposits revealed during the archaeological work can be seen in Appendix 1.1.

Excavation of these footings revealed various deposits comprising alternating dark grey brown sandy silt (002



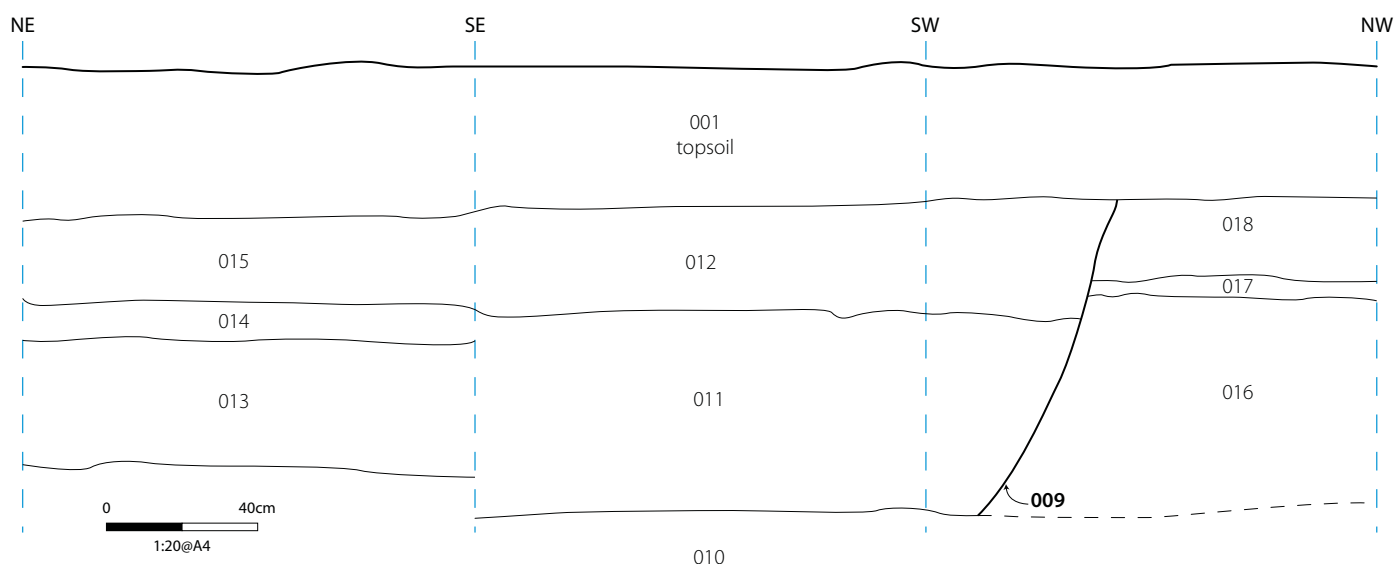
Illus 3

North facing section of southern footing

and 004) and orange brown gravels (003 and 005) (Illus 3 and 6). They lay at a 40° gradient, broadly consistent with the natural slope of the garden. Roman pottery was recovered from the dark grey band (004). A sondage dug at the base of the southern footing trench revealed further sherds of Roman pottery and a coin within deposit (004). These deposits might be the result either of natural movement of material downslope. However, the presence of Roman artefacts within them indicates they may be the result of human disturbance of land upslope of the site in the Roman/post-Roman era.

In the northern most footing trench, a modern water storage unit was uncovered (006) which measured 1.6m in diameter and had a depth of 2.2m from its top to base (Illus 5). The structure was made from red frogged bricks measuring 230x110x70mm with a lime mortar bonding agent and was filled with a mix of dark grey silty and sandy clay and gravels with brick inclusions. It contained several sherds of modern blue and white china, glass bottles, a bell and clay pipe fragments. Adjacent to this is a modern manhole measuring 1.1m by 1.1m was also revealed during later ground reduction. The presence of these more recent truncations suggests that this area of the DA has been extensively truncated, most likely during the construction of Jessamine Cottage, explaining the lack Roman of finds in comparison to those within the southern footing.

To the west of the extension, a soakaway (Illus 4) measuring 1.1x1.1m with a depth of 1.2 was dug which also revealed deposits of alternating layers similar to those observed in the footings. The remains of a probable pit [009] was revealed in the south section. The pit was filled with orange brown gravels (011) and grey brown gravels



Illus 4

West, north and east facing section of soakaway

(012), the former of which contained fragments of Roman tile. It is possible that the gravel deposits in the feature are derived from redeposited natural.

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Ground was reduced by 0.3m to the east and west of the footings and within the footprint of the proposed building revealing deposits of grey silt (002 and 007). These contained Roman pottery and tile and lenses of orange brown gravel (008), (Illus 7). These deposits are thought to represent possible silt washed down a slope, possibly from the known Roman road to the south. As ground reduction was not threatening these deposits no further investigation was undertaken.



Illus 5

Modern water storage unit (006) facing north in northern footing

4. FINDS ASSESSMENT

by Julie Franklin and Rob Perrin

4.1 Introduction

The site lies immediately to the north-east of Watling Street within Insula XIX of the Roman town of Verulamium (Niblett 1987, fig. 1). This report identifies, quantifies and interprets the hand-collected finds. The assemblage is summarised in Table 1.

Context	Pottery (Rom)	CBM	Metalwork	Lithics	Dating
004	16 (466g)	10	Coin	-	4thC
007	14 (794g)	-	Nail	Tool	4thC
011	-	2	-	-	4thC?
Total	30 (1260g)	12	2	1	-

Table 1

Quantification of finds by context, with spot dating

4.2 Methodology

Hand-collected finds were assessed by appropriate specialists and recorded in an Access database. Finds were quantified by sherd count for each type of find or fabric. For the pottery, additional quantification was also recorded, by weight and rim percentage present, as well as individual counts of rim, body and base sherds.

Illus 6 ▶
North facing section of footing



Illus 7 ▶
South facing section of ground reduction showing different deposits



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4.3 Results

Roman pottery

The pottery assemblage is small, comprising 30 sherds, weighing 1,260g, and with a rim EVE of 1.13, recovered from two contexts. Details of each context assemblage are shown in Table 2.

Context	Greywares	Grog	OXCC	Shell Gritted	Total
004	10 (218g)	2 (144g)	–	4 (104g)	16 (466g)
007	10 (666g)	–	1 (6g)	3 (122g)	14 (794g)
Total	20 (884g)	2 (144g)	1 (6g)	7 (226g)	30 (1260g)

Table 2

Summary of pottery by context and fabric

There is a wide variety in the grey ware fabrics but this may not, in all cases, be indicative of separate sources. Most of the pottery requirements of Verulamium, with the exception of finewares, from the 1st to 3rd centuries, were supplied by local kilns forming part of the Verulamium pottery industry. In the 4th century other sources, including Much Hadham, Hertfordshire and Harrold, Bedfordshire became more prominent, although it is likely that pottery was also obtained from other, more local, sources.

A number of vessel forms occur in the grey wares. Most noticeable are three dark grey plain rimmed dishes with faceted surface burnishing and burnished decoration reminiscent of vessels made in Dorset black burnished ware (cf Wilson 1972, fig. 136, 1218; Corder 1945, fig. 18, 1). Another vessel is a large flanged bowl in a grey/brown fabric with reddish-brown core edges (cf Corder



1945, fig. 20, 1, without the internal decoration). A jar in a coarser grey fabric with a slightly warped curved rim may be a Verulamium kiln product (*cf* Wilson 1984, fig. 91, 2229). One grey ware sherd has traces of a white external slip.

Two jars, one with a curved rim and the other with a triangular, undercut rim, occur in shell gritted ware, all of which is likely to have been produced in the Harrold kilns. The source(s) of the grog wares are not known. The only other fabric represented comprises a sherd from an Oxfordshire red colour coated (OXCC) imitation samian ware vessel of uncertain form.

Most of the pottery would fit a 4th century date, though a few sherds are earlier and residual. The average sherd weight of 42g reflects the fact that the assemblage contains some sizeable fragments, most of which were unabraded. The range of vessel forms is essentially utilitarian, though the number of bowls and dishes suggests domestic activity.

Despite the small size of the assemblage, the range of pottery and the size of the fragments suggests the survival of relatively undisturbed archaeological deposits, apparently dating to the later occupation of the Roman town.

6 Ceramic building material

Ceramic building material was recovered from two contexts. Quantification is given in Table 3.

Context	Tegula	Imbrex	Box Flue	Brick	Total
007	2	2	2	4	10
011	-	1	-	1	2
Total	2	3	2	5	12

Table 3

Quantification of CBM by context and type

The brick and tile fabric is all the standard red coloured fabric, except for one shell gritted tegula fragment which is 15mm thick. The other tegula and the box flue tile are only fragmentary; both pieces of the latter have visible edges but no traces of decoration. The brick fragments are incomplete but all quite substantial, with two having two edges; their thickness varies from 35 to 40mm. One of those from Context (007) has part of a scored loop 'signature' and traces of mortar over most of its surface; the other bricks just have patches of mortar. The incomplete nature of the bricks makes it difficult to be certain of their exact form, but it is possible that they are bessalis from a hypocaust pilae. These presumably relate to structures which stood in the immediate vicinity of the site.

Metalwork

The metalwork includes one small copper alloy coin (SF1, Context (004). It is very worn but appears to date to the reign of Claudius II (AD 268–270). Its association with 4th century pottery suggests it was in circulation for some decades by the time of its deposition. This is consistent with its condition. The only other find was a wrought iron nail (Context (007).

Chipped stone

The single flint find is a prehistoric flake tool, but lacks any features by which it could be closely dated. It is clearly residual in Context (007), associated with Roman finds.

5. FAUNAL BONE

by Dr Tim Holden

5.1 Large mammal bone

Nine fragments of unburnt large mammal bone (probably horse/cattle) were found during monitoring consisting of 3 rib fragments, 1 pelvis fragment, 1 scapula fragment and 4 indet. (pelvis or skull) (007).

Based on surface appearance and fragmentation these fragments are clearly of some age. There is nothing to suggest more than one individual present but the density and size of the fragments suggest either cattle or horse. The small size of the assemblage would not permit any detailed discussion of this animal within a regional or temporal context. No signs of butchery were seen.

5.2 Bird

One uncharred bone – a metacarpal from a chicken/pigeon/crow sized bird. This wing bone was unpitted and of fresh appearance and is probably modern in origin.

6. DISCUSSION

The stratigraphy and angle of the Roman deposits revealed during the monitoring works suggests they are a result of material washed or deliberately deposited down slope, possibly from the known Roman road or from the proceeds of Roman or post-Roman construction work immediately to the south. The unabraded pottery assemblage suggests that these deposits have not been reworked, supporting the hypothesis of deliberate deposition, rather than gradual silting.

The Roman deposits were later affected by the construction of the cottage and subsequent landscaping of the gardens, as indicated by the current topsoil cutting into deposits. Indeed, modern disturbance has resulted from the construction of Jessamine Cottage itself and

related structures like the water storage unit (006) and man hole. The construction of these would have had an impact on any archaeological remains within their footprints, indeed the base of (006) extended well beyond the lowest Roman deposit revealed. The construction of St Michaels church to the south could also have an indirect effect on the DA with disturbed soils from the construction being deposited within the DA.

The presence of Roman pottery and tile within the DA is not surprising given its location north of a Roman road and near the known location of a Basilica in Verulamium. Indeed, previous investigations at the front of the cottage revealed probable Roman structural remains (West 1994). However no further evidence of this building was found within the DA. The 4th century Roman remains identified by these investigations add to our knowledge of activity within the Verulamium Scheduled Ancient Monument. However, on their own merits, these remains are of local significance and do not have the potential to contribute to research aims for the Roman period outlined in the regional research framework (Medlycott 2011).

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8. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Site registers

Context register

Context no.	Area	Description
001	Footings and Ground Reduction	0.36m topsoil
002	Footings and Ground Reduction	0.34m dark grey silt
003	Footings and Ground Reduction	0.20m orange brown gravels
004	Footings	0.48m dark grey silt
005	Footings	0.10m orange brown gravels
006	Footings	Dumwell
007	Ground Reduction	Dark grey silt
008	Ground Reduction	Orange brown gravels
009	Soakaway	Cut of pit
010	Soakaway	Dark grey silt at base of soakaway
011	Soakaway	0.52m orange brown gravels
012	Soakaway	0.20m mid grey brown gravels
013	Soakaway	0.22m mottled brown grey sand and gravel
014	Soakaway	0.10m dark grey silt
015	Soakaway	0.22m dark grey brown sand and gravels
016	Soakaway	0.54m grey sandy silt
017	Soakaway	0.06m orange brown gravels
018	Soakaway	0.22m grey sandy silt

Photographic register

Photo no.	Direction	Description
001	–	ID Shot
002	N	Dumwell
003	N	Dumwell
004	ENE	Rear footing
005	S	Southern section of rear footing
006	ENE	Soakaway
007	S	Soakaway
008	W	Soakaway
009	S	Corner of ground reduction
010	W	Working shot
011	W	East facing section of ground reduction west of footings
012	NW	East facing section of ground reduction west of footings
013	W	East facing section of ground reduction west of footings
014	NW	East facing section of ground reduction west of footings
015	ENE	Ground reduction within footings
016	ENE	Ground reduction within footings
017	ENE	Working shot
018	NE	Ground reduction East of footings
019	NE	Ground reduction East of footings
020	W	Manhole W of footings
021	ENE	West facing section of ground reduction east of footings
022	N	Manhole covered at top of driveway
023	S	Ground reduction East of footings
024	SW	Working shot
025	NW	Working shot



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