35 ASHCROFT ROAD, CIRENCESTER, GLOUCESTERSHIRE.

NGR: SP 0220 0174

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
AR00

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SUMMARY

In August 2000 Foundations Archaeology was commissioned to undertake an archaeological watching brief to monitor the digging of foundation footings during the construction of a new kitchen at 35 Ashcroft Road, Cirencester (NGR: SP 0220 0174). The 'L' shaped trench footings measured 3m in length by 1m in width, totalling an area of 6m square. The archaeological works comprised the monitoring of foundation trenches for the new building.

The monitoring work revealed significant archaeological deposits including walls/foundations and ceramic mosaic *tesserae* all dating to the Roman period. Roman, Medieval and Post-Medieval artefacts were recovered from the watched area.

GLOSSARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Archaeology

For the purpose of this project archaeology is taken to mean the study of past human societies through their material remains from prehistoric times to the modern era. No rigid upper date limit has been set, but AD 1900 is used as a general cut-off point.

Medieval

The period between the Norman Conquest (AD 1066) and *c*. AD 1500.

Natural

In archaeological terms this refers to the undisturbed natural geology of a site, in this case the natural is chalk.

NGR

National Grid Reference from the Ordnance Survey Grid.

OD

Ordnance datum; used to express a given height above sea level.

OS

Ordnance Survey

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 In August 2000 Foundations Archaeology undertook an archaeological watching brief commissioned by Mr & Mrs Groves, in response to the planning application 472.1/CT.7875

1.2 The watching brief was concerned with the land to the rear of 35 Ashcroft Road upon which a kitchen/extension was to be constructed. The watching brief was undertaken in accordance with the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994), Archaeological Guidance Paper 4: *Archaeological Watching Briefs: (guidelines)* issued by English Heritage (London Region), the Project Design prepared by Foundations Archaeology (2000) and *Standards for Archaeological Assessment and Field Evaluation in Wiltshire* (1995).

1.3 This document presents the findings of the archaeological watching brief and conforms to the specification set out in Appendices 4 and 5 of *The Management of Archaeological Projects* (English Heritage 1991).

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2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

2.1 The town of Cirencester and its surrounding landscape is widely recognised as an important historic region with extensive archaeological activity. The town lies in south-east Gloucestershire towards the southern end of the Cotswold Hills. The geology within the town perimeter is predominately Quaternary gravels (Darvill & Gerrard, 1994).

2.2 The earliest evidence of human activity consists of substantial scatters of Mesolithic (to 4000 BC) worked flint in the Preston parish area.

2.3 Possible Neolithic (4000-2000 BC) settlement is represented by flint scatters (including leaf shaped projectile points) just north of Hare Bushes.

2.4 Bronze Age (2000-700 BC) burial barrows occur in the Wellhill Plantation and Stratton Field districts. A concentration of ring ditches lies to the east of Preston village. One of these ditched enclosures yielded sherds of mid to late Bronze Age pottery.

2.5 Earthworks and dykes to the north of the town at Bagendon, enclose an area of approximately 200ha, and have been dated to the Iron Age (700 BC-50 AD). Artefacts recovered from this site include Dobunnic coinage, ceramic and glass. Bagendon has commonly been interpreted as a pre-Roman *oppida*.

2.6 Initial Roman (50-410 AD) activity in Cirencester appears to have been primarily military in nature: evidenced by the building of the Leaholme fort. The area was subsequently given official Roman recognition as a *Civitas* (provincial) capital. By the fourth century AD Cirencester had grown to a

stone walled Roman town including a *Forum* and *Basilica*, grid street system and stone buildings.

2.7 Mention is made of Cirencester in the Anglo-Saxon charters; this fact along with archaeological evidence suggests limited occupation in the pre/early medieval period. Manifold construction and archaeological excavation throughout the town have indicated that by c1400 AD Cirencester had regained an occupation area equivalent to that of the Roman period. Archaeological deposits and historical sources suggest that occupation has been constant throughout the post-medieval period.

3 AIMS

3.1 The aims of the watching brief were to gather high quality data from the direct observation of archaeological deposits in order to provide sufficient information to establish the nature, extent, preservation and potential of any surviving archaeological remains.

3.2 These aims were to be achieved by the pursuit of the following specific objectives as stated in the Project Design (Foundations Archaeology 1999).

i) to define, identify and record any archaeological deposits on site, and date these where possible.

ii) to attempt to characterise the nature of the archaeological sequence and recover as much information as possible about the spatial patterning of features present on the site.

iii) where possible to recover a well dated stratigraphic sequence and recover coherent artefact, ecofact and environmental samples.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Foundation trenches for the extension were cut in an area that had previously been part of a rear garden. The 'L' shaped footings measured 3m by 1m in the north-south branch of the trench and 3m by 1m in the east-west aligned part of the trench.

4.2 All excavation was undertaken manually; initially by builders, then by archaeologists once archaeological deposits had been identified.

5 RESULTS

5.1 The natural gravels of the area were reached at a depth of ? A thin interface layer of mid brown, firm, gravely, silt clay with frequent charcoal streaks, (116) located in the east-west part of the trench and (119) identified in the north-south part of the trench,

5.2

5.3 Lying uniformly across the natural base of East trench was a shallow interface lens (119) overlaid by context (117). This context was a grey silt soil offering no artefactual material.

5.4 A large amount of artefact finds occurred from both contexts (109) and (116) including tiles, pottery, bone, *tesserae*, and occasional iron nails. These finds are highly indicative of occupation debris.

5.5 A rectangular cut with uniform vertical sides <107> was excavated in the South trench. This cut was filled by (108); a mid-brown sandy clay and

beneath this (115); a dark brown heavily decomposed humeric soil. A securely stratified coin was recovered from (115). Animal bone from these two contexts showed signs of butchery. The west and east sides of cut <107> consisted of stone wall surrounded by a thin layer of wall fill; <112>, (113) and (114). The position of cut <107> and its related walls directly below a limestone slab indicates that its function was that of a house drain. The humeric nature of fills (108) and (115) serve to enforce this interpretation.

5.6 In the East trench a similar structure was excavated; <111>, (109) and (110). Again, the position and nature of this feature suggest it being a drain. Both drains were excavated to the natural geology.

5.7 Context (106) occurred in the South trench. Consisting of Roman type roof tile and spreading across the width of the trench (average 0.8m), this context is probably the remains of a collapsed wall (see 5.3).

5.8 A limestone slab (104) occurred in both the South and East trenches. The fact that both the pea gravel (see 5.7) and limestone slab appeared to be closely related in their two-dimensional extent indicates that (103) had been laid directly over (104). This phase was interpreted as a mosaic (embedded in pea gravel) overlying a stone base.

5.9 Directly underlying the palaeo-soil, at an average depth of 0.7m beneath topsoil, context (103) appeared to be relatively undisturbed. This pea gravel lens, with an average depth of 0.05m, occurred in both the South and East trenches. Embedded within (103) were large quantities of highly worked ceramic *tesserae.* The majority of *tesserae* finds occurred in the western half of the East trench, although a smaller number were recovered from the South trench. Typology indicates that these ceramics are of Roman date.

5.10 Context (102) occurred at an average depth of 0.5m beneath topsoil. This layer consisted of a dark brown clay/loam and is likely to be the palaeo-soil. Finds from this level included brick and mortar and limited numbers of tesserae.

5.11 Beneath the topsoil (100) a layer of re-deposited soil and limestone was identified. This layer (101) was of a reasonably uniform depth and showed evidence of disturbance throughout. Artefacts included a mixture of medieval and post-medieval pottery. Due to the unstratified nature of this context bone and worked stone proved to be undatable. At this level the nature of cut (118) and its fill (105) was interpreted, by its proximity to the ‘modern’ building, as mixed post-medieval construction debris/rubble and therefore to be considered archaeologically unstratified. A copper buckle/brooch from this context is currently undated.

NOTE: Both the coin (115) and the buckle/brooch (105) require typological analysis to enable closer dating/function interpretation.

6 NATURE OF THE RECORD

6.1 The stratigraphic archive for the site consists of the following elements:

Context Sheets
Sections
Black & White photos
Colour slides

6.2 The on-site methodologies used to recover any evidence were set out in the Foundations Archaeology Project Design (1999a). In summary the following excavation methods were utilised; observation of all groundworks associated with the construction of the new building. The groundworks were undertaken manually. All site recording was undertaken in accordance with the Project Design. The records are available in the archive.

6.3 Following the completion of the Watching Brief an ordered, indexed, and internally consistent site archive has been complied in accordance with Appendix 3 of The Management of Archaeological Projects (English Heritage 1991).

7 CONCLUSIONS

7.1 The small study area limited the success of the watching brief and the post-medieval disturbance associated with the 'modern' building.

7.2 Contexts away from the building and beneath the palaeo-soil appeared to be relatively undisturbed and well stratified.

7.3 Good stratification along with a high quantity of artefactual material allows the structure to be dated to the Roman period.

7.4 The watching brief was the most appropriate response because of the location of 35 Ashcroft Road within the heart of Roman Cirencester. The potential for archaeological deposits to be disturbed by the construction of foundation footings was high.

7.5 The presence (in situ) of Roman foundation walls in conjunction with debris from a mosaic floor at the site of 35 Ashcroft Road suggests that any further construction/earthworks in this area need to be archaeologically monitored.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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9 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Foundations Archaeology would like to thank **(???)**