



Rosemullion, Bishopstone, Herefordshire

Archaeological watching brief



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cover picture: remains of the Roman road from Kenchester to Clyro

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**Rosemullion, Bishopstone,
Herefordshire
(NGR SO 42073 43088)**

An archaeological watching brief

July 2008

Text and illustration:

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Rosemullion, Bishopstone, Herefordshire (NGR SO 42073 43088)

Archaeological watching brief

1 Summary

Archaeological Investigations Ltd was commissioned by PJ Developments to monitor ground-works in a small parcel of land adjacent to Rosemullion, a small property in Bishopstone, Herefordshire.

The village lies to the west of Kenchester, whose origin dates to the Roman period. Situated on the crossing point of two roads built for Scapulas early campaigns against the Welsh, emerged the roadside settlement of *Magnis* (now Kenchester). Named in the 13th Iter of the emperor Antonine, *Magnis* developed from a sprawling roadside settlement into a defended town in the mid-second century when an area was enclosed by walls and a defensive ditch.

The town flourished in the mid-second century and would have been the centre for a prosperous rural community which included the large Roman villas along the River Wye and at Bishopstone, where in 1812 one of the largest mosaics in Great Britain was found (this is now on display in Hereford City Museum).

One of the early military roads from Kenchester to the Roman Fort at Clyro was discovered in ground-works at the site. Although no finds were recovered the deposits exhibited all the hallmarks of Roman road construction in Herefordshire; a foundation of cobbles beneath a compact layer of red gravel.

2 Introduction

Archaeological Investigations Ltd was commissioned by JP Developments to monitor ground-works in a small parcel of land purchased from Rosemullion, the property immediately east of the site. The monitoring was the fieldwork element of a watching brief condition attached to planning reference DCCW2008/0177/F. The proposed works may affect a site of archaeological significance. In line with Planning Policy Guidelines Note 16, section 30 the Planning Authority has been advised that a programme of archaeological work is required, taking the form of an archaeological watching brief.

3 Geology

The underlying geology is the Downtonian Mudstone Formation which undulates from the Malvern Hills to the north, the Black Mountains to the west and the River Severn to the south and is overlain by morainic deposits and till from the Devensian glaciation.

The soils are typical stagnogleys of the Verolds association (which may include alluvial gleys along the line of the Yazor Brook) and argillic or stagnogleyic brown earths of the Escrick 1 association (Ragg *et al* 1984).

4 Archaeological and historical background

The A4103 still follows the line of the Roman road that ran from the fort at Stretton Grandison to the fort at Clyro and recent improvements were carried out by Herefordshire Council. The improvements uncovered extant sections of the former Roman road between Stretton Grandison and Stretton Sugwas in a variable state of preservation. The road comprised compacted layers of cobbles and smaller gravel pebbles bedded directly on the natural soil (Vaughan, 2007).

The same road runs east west through Bishopstone but has never been firmly identified. Archaeological investigation in the grounds of Whipsiderry¹, the property immediately to the east of Rosemullion, found no evidence of a Roman road (Ward, 2003).

A large wealthy villa complex² has been discovered at Bishopstone. The building of a rectory in 1812 uncovered wall foundations and one of the largest mosaics discovered in Roman Britain. The 10m square mosaic featured a geometric design with a central octagonal motif with medallions and urns with rayed motifs. The room the mosaic was found in was central to a complex at least 200m square (RCHM, 1934, 17). The mosaic now hangs in Hereford City museum.

The manor of Bishopstone was in the hundred of Staple and was recorded in Herefordshire Domesday as having 5 hides which pay tax and in lordship 1 plough with another idle. There were 9 villagers, a reeve and a smallholder with 6 ½ ploughs, 1 female slave, and a meadow of 6 acres. The value before 1066 was £3 which later rose to £4.

¹ Sites and Monument Record No 33731

² Sites and Monument Record No 7223

5 Aims and objectives

The project is likely to produce results that are of local archaeological importance. The main aim of the watching brief was to enable the archaeological features to be adequately identified and recorded within the proposed area of the site.

The site specific objectives were to:

- to enable archaeological features to be adequately recorded in the areas affected by the proposal and to confirm the presence or absence of the Roman road within the site.
- assess survival, quality and condition of the Roman road or any other features encountered
- to record the features
- to produce a report
- to produce an archive to be deposited with Hereford City Museum

6 Methodology

Two trenches were excavated on-site using a toothless trenching bucket 1.2m wide. Trench 1 was excavated at a right angle from the modern road and was approximately 6m long. Apart from a modern septic tank no features were observed. A second trench was excavated within the footprint of the proposed building and measured 4.7m north south. It was excavated to a depth of 1.3m where the upper gravel of a Roman road was encountered.

The deposits associated with the road were cleaned and recorded in accordance with Archaeological Investigations Ltd site recording manual (2005) and the Institute of Field Archaeologist standard and guidance for archaeological watching briefs (IFA, 2001).

7 Results

Trench 1 was excavated south from the line of modern road and was soon abandoned when a brick built septic tank and drains leading from it were encountered. The trench was excavated through garden soil and subsoil onto clean sandy silt to a maximum depth of 1.2m (94.886m OD). An extension to the trench was excavated just south and east of the septic tank to trace the line of a modern ceramic drain.

Trench 2 was excavated to the south of trench 1 and was aligned north south. Below the topsoil and subsoil was a thick deposit of clean sandy silt that covered the upper surface of a Roman road. The road consisted of a fragmentary layer of cobbles, compact red gravel that was 0.13m thick and a foundation layer of cobbles (contexts 01, 02 and 03). The camber of the road rose from north to south by 0.16m suggesting that the centre of the road was just south of the trench (see figure 3). The trench was excavated a depth of 1.3m (97.770m OD).

No finds of archaeological interest were retrieved from the site.

8 Discussion

The main Roman roads that run through Herefordshire are probably of military origin, built in the first century for the campaigns into Wales. One of the principle roads is Watling Street which links *Viroconium* (Wroxeter) to *Isca Silurum* (Caerleon) and ran due north and south from one end of the county to the other. Along different parts of its length it is known as East Street, Watling Street and Stoney Street. At Kenchester this road crosses with an east west road that heads up the Wye Valley

from the fort at Stretton Grandison to Clyro and onwards to Brecon. South of Kenchester Wattling Street crosses the River Wye to Abergavenny.

Several excavations have been made through the roads around Kenchester. A section was cut across Wattling Street immediately south of the east gate³ and two further sections immediately north of Old Weir Farm (see figure 4). Parts of the road were also exposed by Herefordshire Archaeology as part of Channel 4's 'Big Dig'. The excavations uncovered several periods of road surface leading to a ford or possible bridge across the River Wye.

Large sections of the Roman road between Stretton Sugwas and Stretton Grandison were excavated from 2002-04 as part of improvements to the A4103. Parts of the road were excavated to the north of the present line and it was comprised of compact layers of cobbles and gravel generally bedded directly on the natural soil matrix. Two areas of cobbles may have been side tracks from the main road.

Artifactual and sediment analysis conducted as part of the project dated the road to the mid 1st century and suggest it was well maintained until the late 2nd to early 3rd century. After this time the ditches that flanked the road were allowed to silt and the road surface was not cleaned of seasonal alluvium.

The road uncovered at the site was probably the continuation of the road from Stretton Grandison that ran just east of Kenchester and onwards up the Wye Valley to Clyro and Brecon. The road probably meanders in the immediate area of the site as previous archaeological work in the property immediately east found no trace of the road.

9 Conclusions

Within the scope of the watching brief condition it was not possible to fully expose the width of the Roman road and hence determine its true orientation. However, the work has determined that the Roman road is in the immediate vicinity of the modern one and within the current site, is in a good state of preservation.

10 Site archive

The primary archive will be deposited with Hereford City Museum and will consist of the following;

- 1 Written and drawn records made on-site
- 2 Colour and black and white film
- 3 Digital photographs
- 4 Microsoft Access database
- 5 A copy of this report (a digital copy of this report will also be submitted to the Archaeology Data Service [ADS] for on-line storage).

³ Sites and Monument Record No 20790

Illustrations

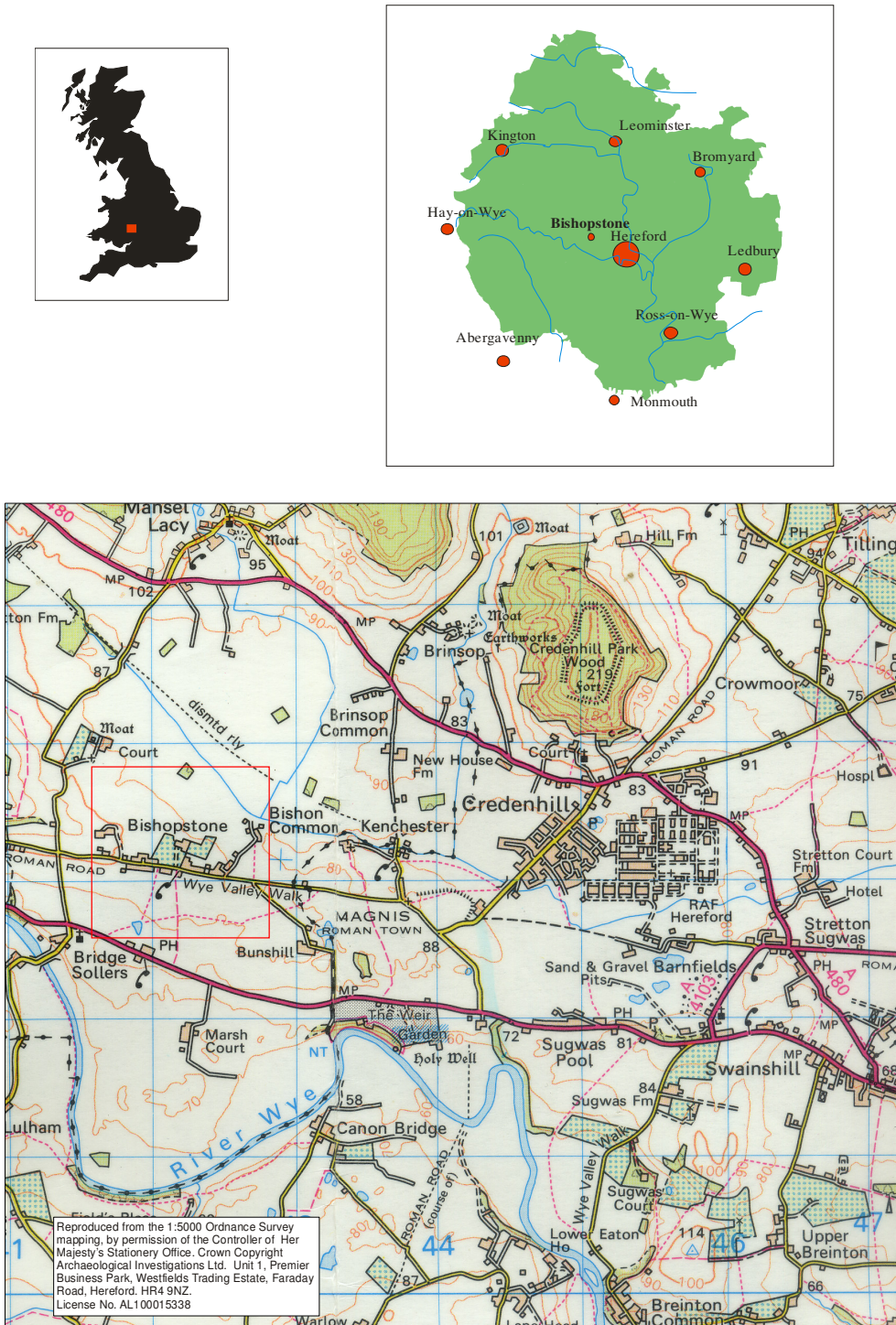
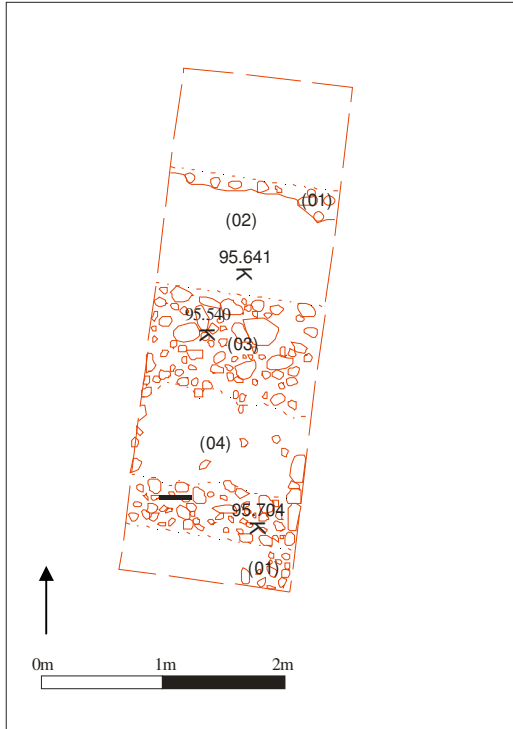


figure 1: location of Herefordshire within the UK and Bishopstone to east of Hereford



	E	N	m OD
SE corner	342073.208	243083.556	96.746
NE corner	342073.814	243088.402	96.614
NW corner	342072.178	243088.564	96.655
SW corner	342071.557	243083.678	96.899



figure 2: trench location plan and the roman road in trench 2

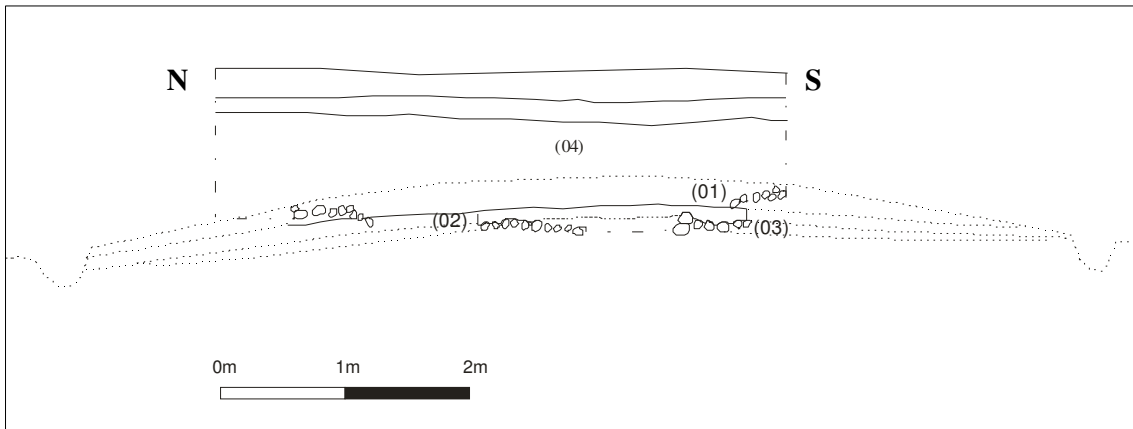


figure 3: section of the Roman road in trench 2 (the dotted lines show the predicted profile of the road)

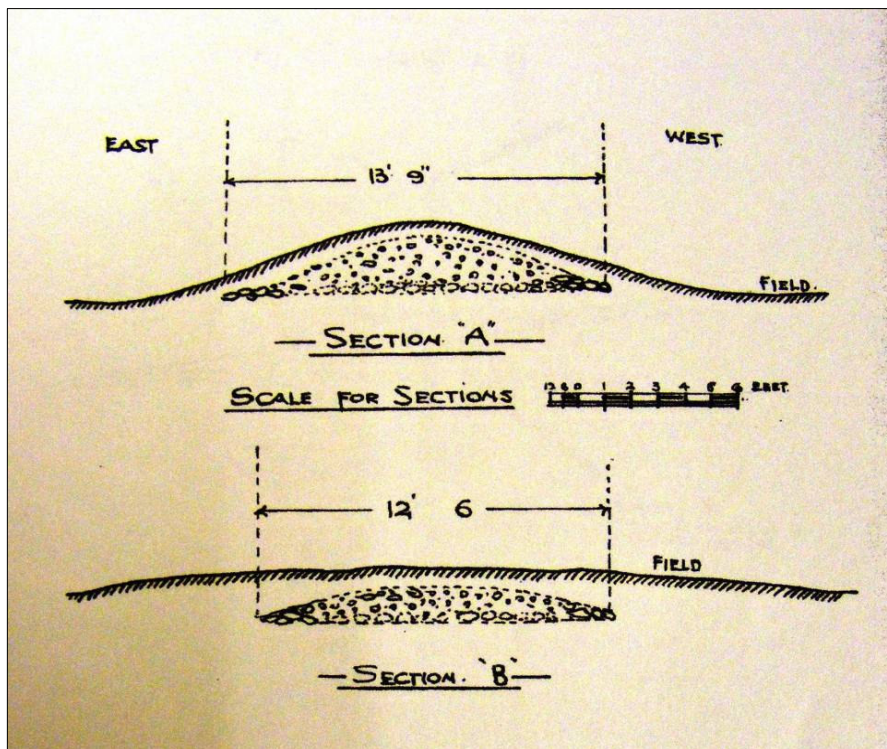


figure 4: sections across the Roman road that runs south from Kenchester. These sections were excavated just north of Old Weir Farm (Jack, 1926)



plate 1: the gravel and cobble foundation of the Roman road

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