

Land at Wolvershill Road, Banwell, North
Somerset:
NGR 339625, 159385

Results from an archaeological trench evaluation

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On behalf of:
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archaeology

LAND AT WOLVERSHILL ROAD, BANWELL, NORTH SOMERSET

Centred on NGR: 339625 159385

RESULTS FROM AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRENCH EVALUATION

SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation, consisting of the excavation and recording of five machine-excavated trenches, was undertaken by AC archaeology on land at Wolverhill Road, Banwell, North Somerset (centred on NGR: 339625 159385) in February 2016. The work was undertaken in support of a planning application for a proposed housing development. None of the trenches revealed any cut features of archaeological interest or evidence for structures. However, a layer representing a buried occupational soil horizon, of Romano-British origin, was revealed in the eastern extent of the site in Trenches 2 and 3. Although no evidence for domestic occupation in the form of buildings or other types of structure was revealed in any of the trenches, a quantity of artefacts indicative of domestic activity was recovered, including pottery dating from the 2nd or 3rd centuries AD and a small number of animal bones. Several land drains of post-medieval / modern date were present in each of the trenches. Although not targeted by this evaluation, evidence for at least one Romano-British structure was identified during archaeological works in 2012 within the proposed development area, however that report remains unpublished.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This document sets out the results of an archaeological trench evaluation on land at Wolverhill Road, Banwell, North Somerset (centred on NGR: 339625 159385) It has been prepared by AC archaeology Ltd on behalf of Strongvox Homes. The proposed development area is shown on Fig. 1.
- 1.2 The application area covers c. 2 hectares of land under pasture and is situated on the east side of Wolverhill Road, to the northeast of the modern village. Topographically, the site slopes down gently to the southwest and lies between 8 and 11m OD. The underlying geology comprises Mercia Mudstone of the Triassic period (BGS DiGMapGB625).

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 An Historic Environment Assessment (HEA) was prepared by AC archaeology (Cottam 2015) in support of the forthcoming planning application, and considered the known heritage assets within the vicinity of the site. The results and conclusions of the HEA are briefly summarised here.
- 2.2 Banwell is noted as a settlement in the Domesday book of 1086, and the parish boundaries do not appear to have changed substantially since the medieval period. Historic mapping from the early 19th century shows the application area as open fields, and later that century a small building is marked towards the southern extent of the site, which seems to have been removed by 1960.

- 2.3** There are 37 designated heritage assets 1km of the proposed development area, comprising a Conservation Area, three Scheduled Monuments, one Grade I, six Grade II*, and 26 Grade II listed buildings.
- 2.4** A Romano-British villa lies in the field to the southeast of the application area, visible as a series of well-preserved earthwork platforms. It has been partially excavated, revealing a bath house, adjoining courtyard and a wall; the full plan of the bath house was exposed through excavation, including the mosaic floor, apse and hot room floor, supported by two rows of *pilae*. Pottery recovered from the site suggest it went out of use during the 4th century AD. It is now waterlogged and somewhat subsided but this suggests that organic material may be preserved *in situ* within the unexcavated portions, and the extents of the earthworks suggest that the majority of the original villa may survive.
- 2.5** A Roman camp in Banwell Woods is a Scheduled Monument comprising a sub-square bank and ditch system measuring approximately 110m by 100m. Situated on a low limestone ridge c. 1km southeast of the proposed development area, the fort lies close to the Scheduled Monument of Banwell Camp, an Iron Age defended settlement, and the Roman camp is considered to be highly significant given its location and the fact that it dates from the Iron Age to Romano-British transitional period.
- 2.6** A Romano-British lead mining and industrial settlement, also a Scheduled Monument, lies c. 1km to the southwest of the site, within a wider field system of similar date; burials associated with a cemetery were also discovered. Large quantities of pottery and coins were recovered along with a coin hoard dating from the mid-4th century AD, and the evidence for metal smelting suggests that this was the primary function of the settlement.
- 2.7** Significant evidence for Romano-British settlement was recorded during the construction of the Banwell to Hutton water pipeline, including buildings, industrial activity and an enclosed cemetery; the waterlogged conditions have led to the survival of wooden artefacts including coffins. At least one building was recorded during the pipeline's construction within the application area (V. Russett, *pers. comm.*), although the report for the archaeological work in 2012 is yet to be published. Numerous other sites and findspots from the Romano-British period are known nearby, indicating that activity during this period was widespread and intense in places.
- 2.8** Three early medieval and 13 later medieval assets include a Saxon minster, a hollow way, fish ponds and mill pond associated with the abbey, and ridge and furrow cultivation. Large numbers of stray finds from the period have been retrieved in and around Banwell, demonstrating the potential for further medieval features and finds to exist within the application area.

3. OBJECTIVES

- 3.1** The aim of the evaluation was to determine, as far as reasonably possible, the nature, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present on the site, and thus describe the significance of any such remains.

4. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

- 4.1** The investigation was undertaken in response to a request made by the North Somerset Council Archaeologist (NSCA), and in accordance with a written scheme of investigation prepared by AC archaeology Ltd (Urmston 2016). A site meeting attended by AC archaeology and the NSCA on 11th February 2016 confirmed the depth of excavation of the trial trenches and agreed the preliminary interpretation of the results.
- 4.2** The investigations comprised the excavation of five trenches, totalling 175m in length, each 1.6m wide (Fig. 1). The trenches were positioned on the ground using a Leica Viva GPS instrument to a layout approved by the NSCA. All levels relate to Ordnance Datum.
- 4.3** All soil removal was undertaken under the control and direction of the Site Archaeologist. Topsoil was removed by tracked mechanical excavator, using a wide toothless bucket, and stored alongside each trench, separated from any subsoil as necessary. Stripping by mechanical excavator ceased at the level at which archaeological deposits or natural geology was exposed. Selected plates showing representative sections are presented in Appendix 2.
- 4.4** All trenches were recorded using the full range of the standard AC archaeology *pro forma* recording system.
- 4.5** The archive has been prepared using the site code ACW879 and is currently stored at the offices of AC archaeology (Wiltshire).

5. RESULTS

Introduction

- 5.1** None of the five trenches revealed any evidence for structures or archaeological cut features, other than modern drainage. With the exception of a buried soil, representing a Romano-British occupational horizon, present in Trenches 2 and 3 (Fig. 2), all of the remaining trenches contained the same soil sequence. This comprised topsoil overlying a depth of post-Roman subsoil, representing probable fluvial deposits. Below this layer and the buried soil horizon in Trenches 2 and 3, the underlying natural subsoil comprised Mercia Mudstone. The level at which the natural geology was encountered varied across the site, but was confirmed in nature by machine-excavated sondages positioned in Trenches 1 – 3 as requested on site by the NSCA. The soil sequence in each trench is summarised below in Table 1.

Trench	Depth below ground	Contexts	Description
1	0 - 200mm 200 – 500mm max 500mm+	Topsoil/grass - context 100 Subsoil – context 101 Natural - context 102	E-W aligned trench situated towards the northwestern extent of the proposed development site on ground sloping down gently to the south. Topsoil /grass composed of dark brown silty-clay loam. Subsoil composed of mid-brown silty clay containing sparse small gravels. Becomes slightly thicker at its west extent within the trench. A single sherd of Romano-British pottery was recovered from this layer. Natural composed of stiff mid-light grey clay slightly gleyed in appearance. One ceramic land drain was noted.
2	0 - 200mm 200 – 500mm max 500 – 600mm max 600mm+	Topsoil/grass - context 200 Subsoil – context 201 Buried soil - context 202 Natural – context 203	E-W aligned trench situated towards the northeastern extent of the proposed development site on ground sloping down gently to the south. Topsoil /grass composed of dark brown silty-clay loam. Subsoil composed of mid-brown silty clay containing sparse small gravels. Buried soil composed of dark grey silty clay containing occasional limestone pieces/gravels and charcoal flecks. A small quantity of Romano-British pottery sherds was recovered from this layer. Natural composed of stiff mid-light grey clay slightly gleyed in appearance. Two land drains were noted.
3 Plates 1 & 3	0 - 200mm 200 – 400mm max 400 – 550mm max 550mm+	Topsoil/grass - context 300 Subsoil – context 301 Buried soil - context 302 Natural – context 303	E-W aligned trench situated towards the southeastern extent of the proposed development site on generally level ground. Topsoil /grass composed of dark brown silty-clay loam. Subsoil composed of mid-brown silty clay containing sparse small gravels. Buried soil composed of dark grey silty clay containing moderate to frequent limestone gravels and charcoal flecks. A quantity of Romano-British pottery sherds and other artefacts was recovered from this layer. Natural composed of stiff reddish brown clay slightly gleyed in appearance. Two land drains were noted.
4 Plate 2	0 - 200mm 200 – 500mm max 500mm+	Topsoil/grass - context 400 Subsoil – context 401 Natural - context 402	E-W aligned trench situated along the southern extent of the proposed development site on slightly undulating ground. Topsoil /grass composed of dark brown silty-clay loam. Subsoil composed of mid-brown silty clay containing sparse small gravels. Becomes slightly thicker at its western extent within the trench. Natural composed of stiff reddish brown clay. Three land drains were noted.
5	0 - 200mm 200 – 450mm max 450mm+	Topsoil/grass - context 500 Subsoil – context 501 Natural - context 502	E-W aligned trench situated towards the southwestern extent of the proposed development site on slightly undulating ground. Topsoil /grass composed of dark brown silty-clay loam. Subsoil composed of mid-brown silty clay containing sparse small gravels. Natural composed of stiff reddish brown clay. Two land drains were noted.

Table 1: Trench Summary

6. FINDS

Romano-British Pottery by M. Corney

6.1 The evaluation at Banwell produced 59 sherds of Romano-British date.

6.2 The pottery has been scanned by context and broad details of fabric types noted using the National Roman Fabric Reference Collection (Tomber and Dore 1998), supplemented by reference to forms and fabrics described by Tyers (1996). Quantification is by sherd count for each context and the results, with comments on date and form presented on Table 2.

6.3 The pottery assemblage is exclusively Romano-British and, with the exception of 3 sherds of Samian Ware, and includes of local or regional coarse wares.

Context	No.	Description	Date
101	1	Central Gaulish samian Dr18/31	2nd century
202	10	East Gaulish samian Dr18/31; 3 BBI including everted rim jar of 2 nd century form; 4 Congresbury Ware rim and body sherds; 2 grey sandy body sherds	Mid-2nd to early 3rd century
302	48	Central Gaulish samian Dr37 with figure of dancing Maenad; 3 sherds from hemispherical bowl with cornice rim in fine oxidised fabric; 10 BBI sherds including plain-rim dish; 28 sherds of Congresbury or related fabrics including slack profile jars; 2 dark grey sandy body sherds; 2 oxidised coarse body sherds.	2nd century
TOTAL	59		

Table 2: Pottery assessment by context

Comment

6.4 This is a small assemblage of 2nd century AD date although the East Gaulish Dr18/31 from context 202 could be as late as the first quarter of the third century. The assemblage is dominated by local coarse wares, notably products of the Congresbury industry and its affiliates. All the diagnostic rims from the coarse wares are known local types and the lack of developed later Roman forms or fine wares such as Oxford or New Forest products confirms a mid Romano-British date. The majority of the sherds are in a good condition with little evidence of abrasion, etc. The only exception to this is the Central Gaulish Dr37 from 302, where the slip over the external decorative scheme has been removed, possibly deliberately.

Animal Bone

6.5 Eleven fragments of animal bone (total 60g) were recovered from layer 302. The material includes small fragments of cattle and sheep/goat.

7. COMMENT

7.1 Although the trench evaluation did not reveal any archaeological features cutting the subsoil or evidence for structures, it has identified a distinct archaeological layer that appears to represent a former occupational horizon of Romano-British date. This layer was present throughout Trenches 2 and 3, situated in the eastern extent of the proposed development area. A moderate quantity of domestic debris, including pottery sherds and animal bone, was recovered from this layer, notably from Trench 3 – context 302. It is likely that this occupational horizon relates to the former Romano-British Villa site situated to the southeast of the proposed development.

7.2 This, added to the presence of archaeological deposits identified in the Bristol Water pipe trench in 2012, would suggest there is some potential for further deposits of this date in the vicinity; however, the previous work undertaken by Border Archaeology has yet to be published at the time of writing. The results of this evaluation suggests that any further archaeological remains within the development area are localised and likely to lie within the eastern part of the field, rather than being more widespread. Any such remains could be recorded during development as part of a planning condition.

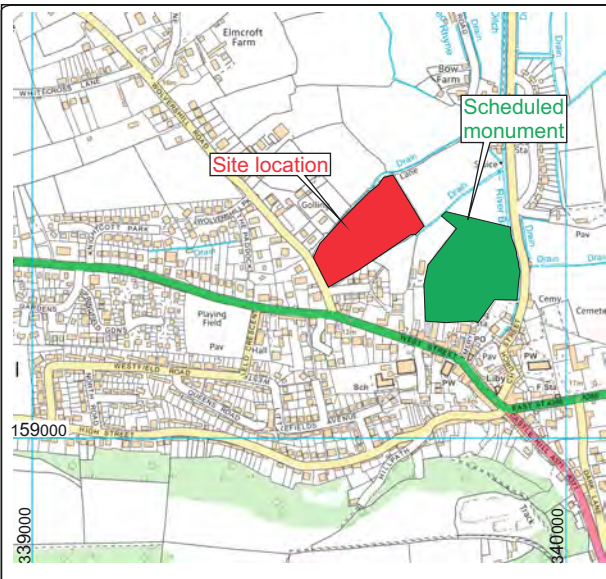
8. REFERENCES

Cottam, S., 2015 '*Land off Wolvershill Road, Banwell, North Somerset. Historic Environment Assessment*' Unpublished report by AC archaeology Ltd no. ACW838/1/0.

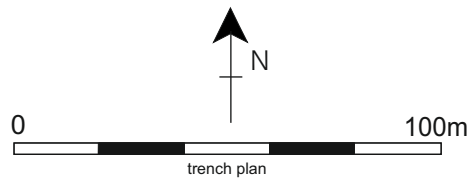
Tomber, R. and Dore, J. 1998. *The National Roman Pottery Reference Collection: A Handbook*. MoLAS Monograph No 2. London.


Tyers, P. A. 1997. *Roman Pottery in Britain*. London.

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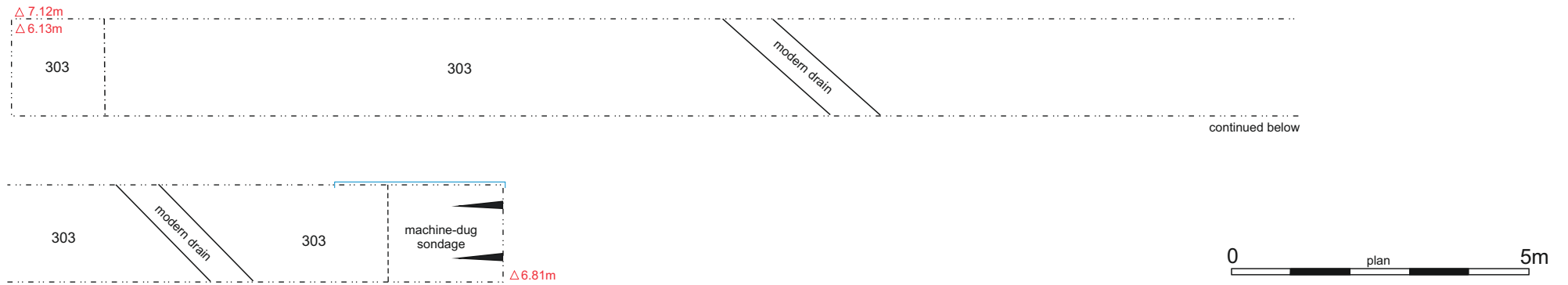
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Wolvershill Road, Banwell

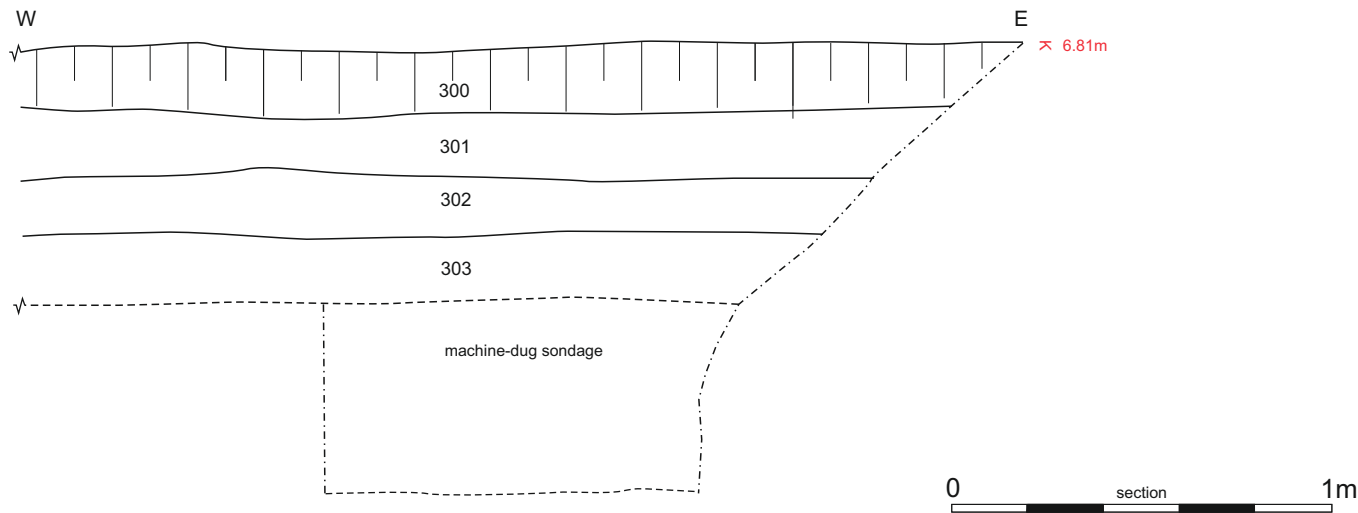
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Fig. 1: Site and trench location

a) Plan



b) Section, east end of trench



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TITLE

Fig. 2: Plan and section, Trench 3



Plate 1: Representative south-facing section of Trench 3, looking north



Plate 2: Representative south-facing section of Trench 4, looking north



Plate 3: Trench 3, looking west

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