

# The Kings of Wessex Academy, Station Road, Cheddar, Somerset.

## An Archaeological Evaluation



**The Kings of Wessex Academy, Station Road, Cheddar, Somerset.**

**An Archaeological Evaluation**

for

**The Kings of Wessex Academy**

by



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**Scheduled Monument no:** SM 29673

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## Non-technical summary

*Context One Archaeological Services (COAS) carried out an archaeological evaluation at The Kings of Wessex Academy, Station Road, Cheddar, Somerset (the 'Site'), on 19 September 2014. The project was commissioned by Mr Chris Brown (Bursar) on behalf of The Kings of Wessex Academy. The Site is wholly situated within the boundary of a Scheduled Monument (No: SM 29673) described as "Roman settlement site, Anglo-Saxon and Norman royal palace, and St Columbanus' Chapel".*

*The investigation was required by Ms Melanie Barge (Inspector of Ancient Monuments, English Heritage) in order to inform a proposal for a minor extension as part of new kitchen/dining facilities. The Site lies within an area where significant archaeology may survive, as defined in the Monument Management Plan for the school.*

*Despite the potential for significant Roman, Saxon and medieval remains on the Site, the field evaluation exposed very little archaeological evidence. This was limited to a pit or ditch terminal yielding a few sherds of Romano-British pottery from the surface and a small lump of undiagnostic ironwork. Although the evaluation also revealed significant modern disturbance, this feature provides an indicator of the horizon at which other archaeological remains may be expected. With the surface of this feature at 10.03m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) this is at a similar height to spot heights for archaeological horizons recorded close to the development area (at 10.30m aOD), and lies at 0.8m below the current ground surface at the rear of the development area and only 0.1m below the current ground surface at the front of the development area.*

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Context One Archaeological Services Ltd (COAS) carried out an archaeological evaluation at The Kings of Wessex Academy, Station Road, Cheddar, Somerset (the ‘Site’), on 19 September 2014. The project was commissioned by Mr Chris Brown (Bursar) on behalf of The Kings of Wessex Academy. The Site is wholly situated within the boundary of a Scheduled Monument (No: **SM 29673**) described as “Roman settlement site, Anglo-Saxon and Norman royal palace, and St Columbanus’ Chapel”.
- 1.2 The investigation was required by Ms Melanie Barge (Inspector of Ancient Monuments, English Heritage) in order to inform a proposal for a minor extension as part of new kitchen/dining facilities. Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) to permit the evaluation was granted on 16 September (ref. S00092515) by English Heritage on behalf of the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. The requirement followed advice by Central Government as set out the *Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 as Amended (1983)* and paragraph 128 of the *National Planning Policy Framework (DCLG 2012)*.
- 1.3 The Site lies within an area defined in the Monument Management Plan (SCC, EH, N.D.) for the school as:
- “Areas where significant archaeology may survive with levels of disturbance not detailed. These areas may have the potential for development but prior to finalisation of proposal plans an appropriate level of assessment must take place involving trial trench evaluation to characterise the surviving remains.”*
- 1.4 The evaluation comprised four elements: the production of a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) which set out the project strategy; evaluation through trial trenching; post-excavation and report production; and archive deposition. The WSI was submitted in support of the Scheduled Monument Consent application on 28 August 2014.

## 2. Site location and topography

- 2.1 The Site (centred on NGR ST 45789 53091) covers a rectangular area of 180 square metres adjoining the eastern side of a kitchen and changing room block within Kings of Wessex Academy (**Figure 1**). To the west of the Site is a tarmacked playground, while the north and south sides are flanked by the existing building. The western side of the Site is situated at an average height of c. 10.83m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) with a bank on the eastern side sloping down to an average height of c. 10.13m above aOD. Prior to development works, the Site was occupied by a patio with some small bushes.
- 2.2 Buildings belonging to Kings of Wessex Academy occupy the northern area of the Scheduled Monument (No: **SM 29673**), while the larger southern part is predominantly used as playing fields (1 on **Figure 2**).

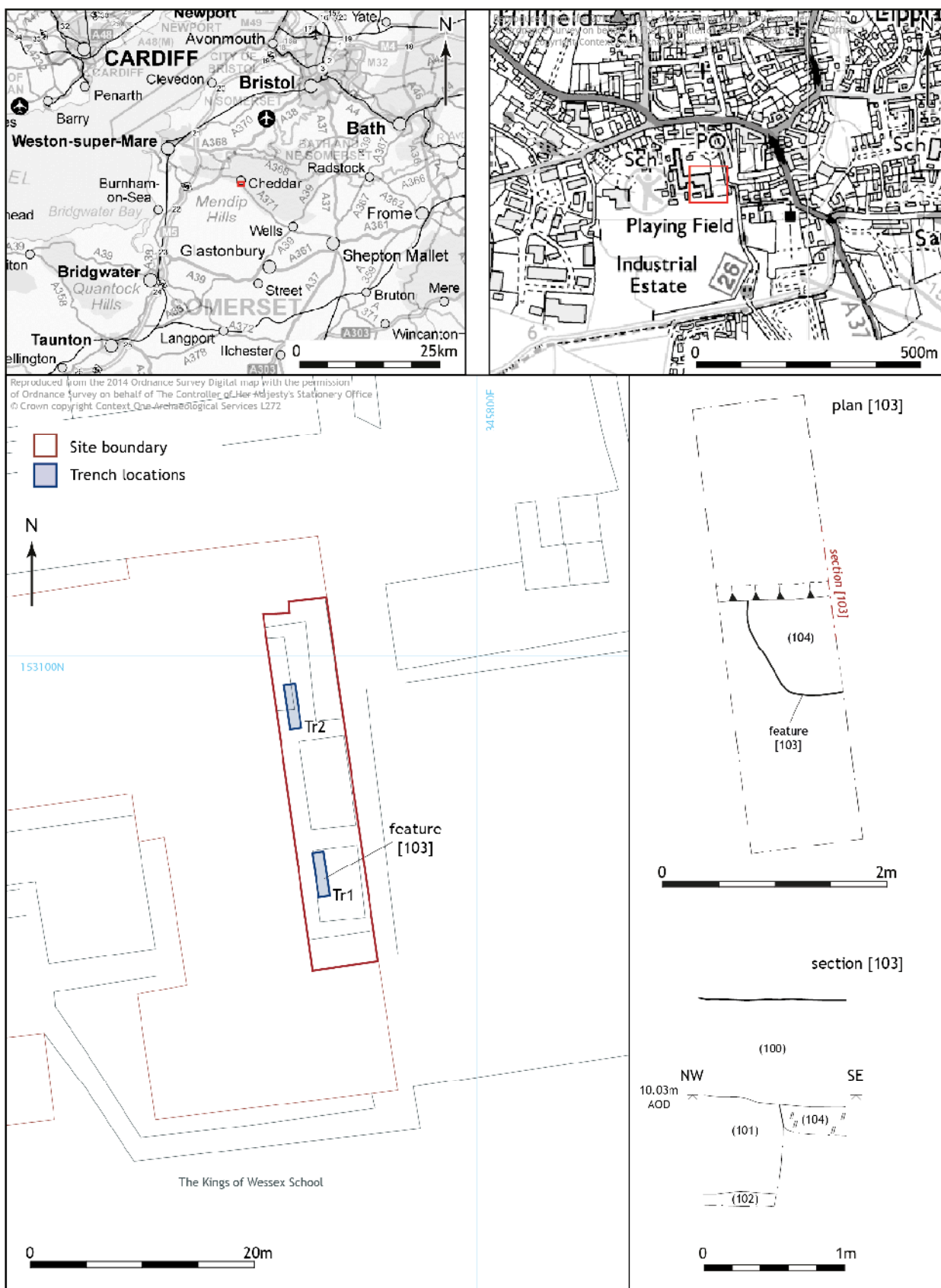
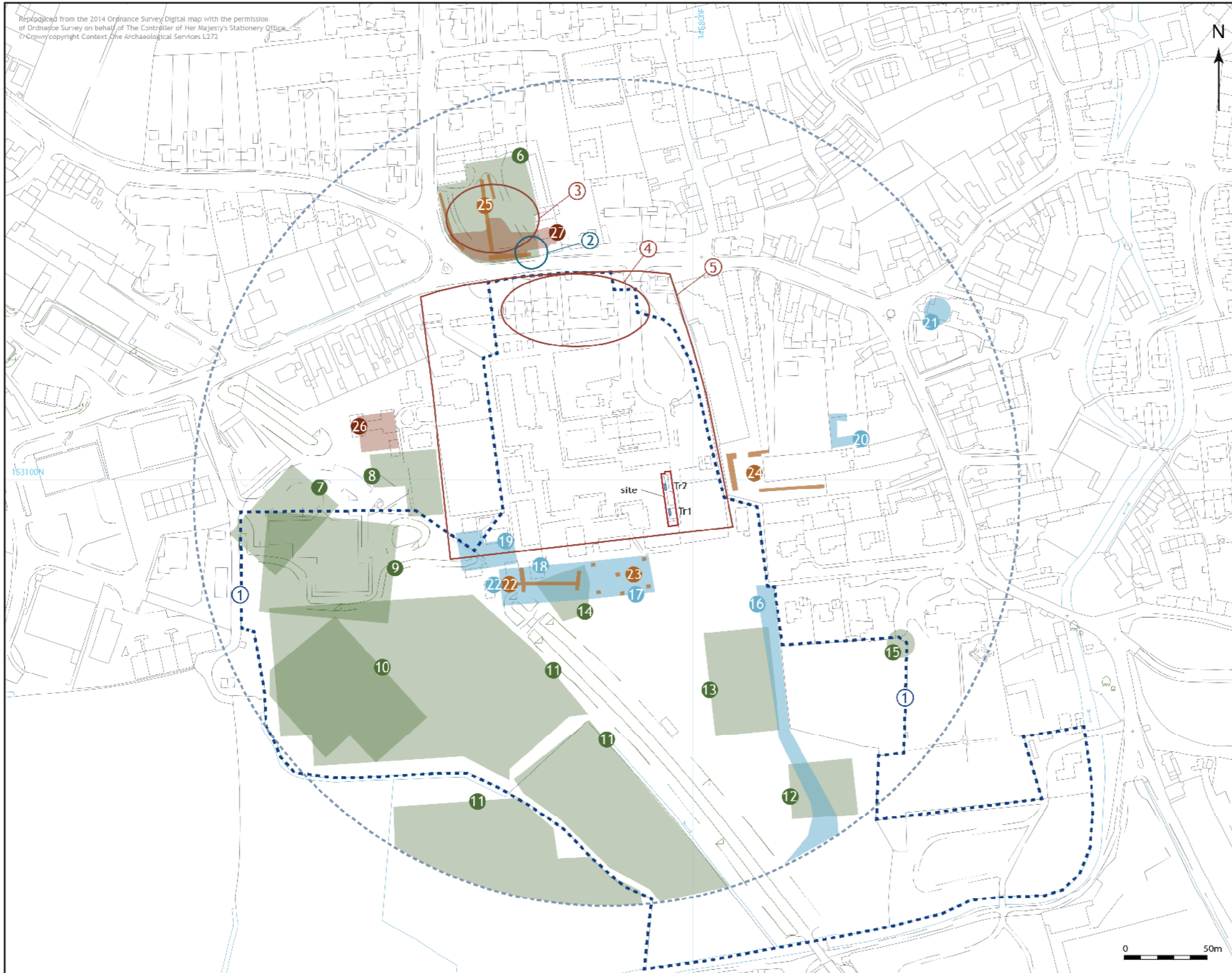


Figure 1. Site setting and trench locations

### 3. Archaeological background

- 3.1 The archaeological background for the Site has been drawn principally from secondary sources. This comprises records held by Somerset County Council as part of the Somerset Historic Environment Record (HER; referred to below with the prefix PRN followed by a unique numeric identifier) and other published and unpublished secondary sources. Heritage assets within a 250m radius of the Site are located and enumerated on **Figure 2**.
- 3.2 There have been a number of archaeological interventions in the vicinity of the Site, many of which have yielded evidence for extensive settlement and other activity over a considerable period of time.
- 3.3 The earliest phase of activity evidenced in the area is prehistoric. Possible Iron Age occupation was identified during a watching brief and evaluation between 2000 and 2001 (**PRN 44966, 22 on Figure 2**), and flint was recovered during a subsequent watching brief (**PRN 11337, 18 on Figure 2**).
- 3.4 There is a substantial body of evidence for Roman settlement. The most substantial find is a probable villa, visible as a parch mark adjacent to St Andrew's church some 250m to the south-east. Elsewhere, a rectangular shaped masonry structure, associated with 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century pottery was revealed during a watching brief in 1999 (**PRN 12891, 17 on Figure 2**), along with other probable structures and numerous finds dating from the mid-1<sup>st</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> century, including 87 coins. An evaluation in 1998 (**PRN 35934, 23 on Figure 2**) revealed well-preserved Roman features, including a probable well and a substantial ditch, as well as quantities of building rubble.
- 3.5 A watching brief in 2005-6 resulted in the excavation of numerous ditches and pits spanning the late Iron Age and Roman period (**PRN 24682, 19 on Figure 2**). This included two broad phases of activity; 1<sup>st</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD and 3<sup>rd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. The latter was marked by five dated features including two inhumation burials cut into features from the first phase. Radiocarbon dating of the inhumations returned calibrated dates for the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. Pottery recovered from features attributable to the first phase included diagnostic sherds that are typical of the transitional phase between the late Iron Age and early Romano-British period. The excavated features were predominantly linear ditches, and would appear to represent part of a broadly contemporary system of fields or other enclosures, perhaps originating in the latest pre-Roman Iron Age, with the ditches silting substantially during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD.
- 3.6 There is also evidence for a widespread system of field enclosures from this period, which can be taken as evidence for a contemporary managed and farmed landscape in which the settlement foci were located. Geophysical survey has detected linear anomalies over a wide spread area (**PRN 12742, 9 on Figure 2; PRN 12841, 10 on Figure 2; PRN 12842, 7 on Figure 2**) and open area excavation recorded a substantial late Roman ditch, which was re-cut at least once, suggesting 'agricultural activity at the extremity of settlement'.
- 3.7 An excavation ahead of a new drama block in 2007 recorded four archaeological features comprising two ditches, a pit and a posthole (**PRN 26098, 26 on Figure 2**). None of these features produced conclusive dating evidence but all were conjectured as Roman or later based on comparison with features previously recorded in the immediate environs.

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- National Heritage List - English Heritage**
- SM 1017290 Roman settlement site, Anglo-Saxon and Norman royal palace, and St Columbanus' Chapel
- Somerset HER Record - Monuments**
- PRN No. 44783 Post-Roman ditch
  - PRN No. 18256 medieval remains
  - PRN No. 30421 medieval manor site
  - PRN No. 11442 Medieval royal and episcopal palace, including:
    - 12738 Evaluation (1987)
    - 12742 Geophysical survey (1990)
    - 12760 Cheddar Palace excavation (1960, 1961, 1962)
    - 12838 Geophysical survey (1990)
    - 12839 Geophysical survey (1990)
    - 12840 Geophysical survey (1991)
    - 12841 Geophysical survey (1991)
    - 12842 Geophysical survey (1991)
    - 12843 Watching brief (1988)
    - 12844 Evaluation (1997)
    - 12845 Watching brief (1993)
    - 12977 Watching brief (1998)
    - 12978 Watching brief (1998)
    - 13146 Former chapel dedicated to St Columbanus
    - 15836 Watching brief (2002)
    - 15898 Watching brief (2002)
    - 24681 Watching Brief (2007)
    - 24682 Watching Brief (2005-2006)
    - 26098 Excavation (2007)
    - 28838 Negative watching brief (1996)
- Somerset HER Record - Events Geophysical Survey**
- PRN No. 57179 Geophysical survey (1998)
  - PRN No. 12842 Geophysical survey (1991)
  - PRN No. 12840 Geophysical survey (1991)
  - PRN No. 17747 Geophysical survey (1990)
  - PRN No. 12841 Geophysical survey (1991)
  - PRN No. 35938 Magnetic susceptibility survey (1999)
  - PRN No. 35937 Resistivity survey (1999)
  - PRN No. 12839 Geophysical survey (1990)
  - PRN No. 12838 Geophysical survey (1990)
  - PRN No. 35937 Geophysical survey (1999)
  - PRN No. 29335 Geophysical survey (2005)
- Somerset HER Record - Events Watching Brief**
- PRN No. 4473, 44911 Watching brief (1999-2000)
  - PRN No. 12891 Watching brief (1999)
  - PRN No. 11337 Watching brief (2001)
  - PRN No. 24682 Watching brief (2005-2006)
  - PRN No. 16136 Watching brief (1991)
  - PRN No. 15547 Watching brief (1988)
  - PRN No. 44966 Evaluation (2000) and watching brief (2001)
- Somerset HER Record - Events Evaluation**
- PRN No. 44966 Evaluation (2000) and watching brief (2001)
  - PRN No. 35934 Evaluation (1998)
  - PRN No. 22522 Evaluation (2007)
  - PRN No. 5/1/8 Evaluation (199/)
- Somerset HER Record - Events Excavation**
- PRN No. 26098 Excavation (2007)
  - PRN No. 18254 Excavation (2001)

<b>PROJECT TITLE</b>		
The Kings of Wessex Academy, Station Road, Cheddar, Somerset		
<b>FIGURE TITLE</b>		
Her events within 250m radius of Site		
<b>SCALE</b>	<b>PROJECT CODE</b>	<b>FIGURE NO.</b>
as shown	C1/EVA/14/KWC	2

Figure 2. HER events within 250m radius of Site



- 3.8 Following the Roman period there is little evidence of activity in the vicinity until the later Anglo-Saxon period, when in the mid-10<sup>th</sup> century a Royal Palace is known to have existed adjacent to the Site. Excavations directed by Philip Rahtz between 1960 and 1962 (PRNs 11442 & 12760, 5 on Figure 2) revealed that the chapel of St Columbanus had origins in the 10<sup>th</sup> century and was predated by a substantial long hall (c. 24m x 6.1m), and two, probably contemporary, minor buildings. In the 10<sup>th</sup> century the first chapel was constructed and the long hall was replaced with a large structure (c. 18.5m x 9.25) referred to as the West Hall. A number of minor structures were probably contemporary with this building. Both the West Hall and the chapel of St Columbanus were rebuilt in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and the West Hall was again rebuilt in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. During the 12<sup>th</sup> century the West Hall was replaced with a larger structure to the east, the East Hall. In the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> centuries both the East Hall and the chapel of St Columbanus were rebuilt.
- 3.9 The Royal Palace continued to exist until 1230 when the estate was given to the Dean and Chapter of Wells. The estate passed out of ecclesiastical ownership in 1548 when Bishop Barlow sold it to Edward VI. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the chapel was converted into a dwelling, which continued to be occupied until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- 3.10 The Kings of Wessex Community School was constructed in the early 1960's and has undergone subsequent phases of expansion.

## 4. Methodology

### Archaeological methodology

- 4.1 The programme of archaeological work was carried out in accordance with the *Heritage Service Archaeological Handbook* issued by Somerset County Council in 2011, and the codes, standards and guidelines set out by the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA 1985, rev. 2012; 1990, rev. 2008; 1994, rev. 2008). Current Health and Safety legislation and guidelines were followed on site.
- 4.2 The evaluation comprised two trenches each measuring 4m x 1.0m in plan positioned at each end of the Site (Figure 1; Plate 1). This equates to a c. 4.5% sample of the Site. The location of the trenches were laid out using a TopCon GRS-1 Global Positioning System pre-loaded with Ordnance Survey grid co-ordinates.
- 4.3 A JCB machine fitted with a 1.2m wide toothless grading bucket was used to remove topsoil/ploughsoil and continued until archaeological features or natural geology was encountered, whichever was first.
- 4.4 In the absence of archaeological features and deposits in Tr2, one long face was cleaned by hand to define the sequence of deposits. A representative section was then recorded using a COAS *pro forma* evaluation trench sheet. A digital photograph was also taken of the section as well as the long axis of the trench. All photographs included an appropriate scale.
- 4.5 The archaeological feature encountered in Tr1 was fully exposed within the confines of the trench but was not excavated. The feature was recorded using a COAS *pro forma* evaluation trench sheet. The location, extent and altitude of the feature was mapped relative to the National Grid and Ordnance Datum using a TopCon GRS-1 Global Positioning System. A photographic record was made of the feature as well as working shots to illustrate the nature of the archaeological operation mounted
- 4.6 Artefacts collected from the surface of the archaeological feature were bagged using a combination of site code and context number. All finds from the Site were retained for processing in preparation for further analysis and archiving.
- 4.7 Somerset County Historic Environment Service (HES) and English Heritage (EH) were notified prior to the commencement of archaeological works. Upon completion of the evaluation, in agreement with EH/HES, all trenches were backfilled by machine and compacted.

## 5. Results

- 5.1 All deposits were recorded as individual contexts and ascribed a unique number. In the text, context numbers for cuts appear in square brackets, e.g. [1004]; layer and fill numbers appear in standard brackets, e.g. (1002). Where a feature is discussed, it is referenced with its cut and associated fill numbers.

### General deposit sequence

- 5.2 The general deposit sequence comprised an uppermost layer of overburden measuring 0.5m (200) to 0.8m (100) deep comprising mixed brown/ black soft to friable silt/clay with gravel and fragments of brick and tile (**Plate 2**). This overlay a make-up layer measuring 0.6m (101) to 0.7m (201) deep consisting of light yellowish brown compacted silt/clay/sand with occasional stones, above a reddish brown clay/sand natural (102) (202) with occasional to frequent sub-rounded stones.

### Archaeological features

- 5.3 A single feature [103] was exposed towards the centre of Tr1, sealed beneath the overburden (100) at a depth of 0.8m below ground surface. The feature was not excavated although in plan it was sub-rounded and was exposed for a length of 1.0m and a width of 0.75m wide, before extending into the eastern baulk (**Plates 3 & 4**). The single backfill (104) comprised dark blackish brown firm silt/clay with frequent charcoal flecks (**Plate 5**). A total of 6 small sherds of pottery and a small piece of corroded iron were recovered from the surface of the feature. Sewage pipes crossed Tr2 disturbing the ground in several locations, with a modern concrete drain crossing the trench at 90 degrees just south of the centre (**Plate 6**).



Plate 1. General shot showing excavation of Tr1 (from N)



Plate 2. Profile in Tr2 (from W; 1m scales)



Plate 3. Tr1 showing feature [103] (from S; 0.5m & 1m scales)



Plate 4. Tr1 showing feature [103] (from N; 0.5m & 1m scales)



Plate 5. Tr1 showing feature [103] in plan (from S; 0.5m scales)



Plate 6. Tr2 showing modern concrete drain (from SW; 1m scales)

## 6. The finds

### Pottery, by Rachel Hall

- 6.1 A total of 6 sherds weighing 11g, were recovered from two contexts from the evaluation (see **Table 1**). The assemblage dates to the Romano-British period. The sherds are all in an abraded condition ranging from fair to poor with an average sherd size of 1.8g. Five greyware sherds were recovered from layer (104). The body sherds are all in a reduced, sandy fabric and are abraded. A single fineware sherd was also recovered from layer (104). The abraded whiteware sherd is an Oxfordshire Fineware, dating to the mid- 3rd century AD.

No further work is required on this assemblage.

Trench	Context	Fabric	Date	Number	Weight (g)
1	104	Greyware	RB	5	9
1	104	Oxfordshire Fineware	LRB	1	2
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>

Table 1. Pottery by Trench, Context, Fabric, Date, Number and Weight (g).

### Other finds, Cheryl Green

- 6.2 A small piece of undiagnostic iron weighing 20.9g was recovered from layer (104). This would benefit from an X-radiograph as part of any further phase of works as it may be a corroded object.

## 7. Discussion

- 7.1 Despite the potential for significant Roman, Saxon and medieval occupation on the Site, the field evaluation exposed very little archaeological evidence. This was confined to a sub-rounded feature yielding a few sherds of Romano-British pottery and a small lump of undiagnostic ironwork from the surface. The feature was not excavated and was protected *in situ* however it is likely to represent either a pit or a ditch terminal which continued eastwards. No archaeological features/deposits were observed within Trench 2 and no finds were recovered, the trench having been heavily disturbed by modern services.
- 7.2 Spots heights for archaeological horizons across the school site have been mapped using data from previous interventions and this indicates that remains can generally be encountered between 7.67m - 11.13m aOD with the closest to the development area being recorded as 10.30m aOD (SCC, EH, N.D., Appendix 2, no. 7). Indeed, the surface of the pit/ ditch terminal exposed during the evaluation is located at 10.03m aOD. The present ground surface at the rear of the patio is 10.83m aOD and at the front of the patio is 10.13m. With an anticipated foundation depth for the proposed kitchen/dining extension likely to be 1.0m, the reduced

levels would be c. 9.13m. As such, this would have certainly have a substantial an impact on the archaeological horizons, although modern disturbance has no doubt reduced the extents of any possible remains.

## 8. Archive

8.1 The project archive is currently held by COAS and consists of the following:

Item	Number	Format
Profile record sheets	2	Paper
Photographic register	1	Paper
Digital images	31	.JPG

8.2 The paper archive has been scanned as a single file in .PDF format and will form part of the physical Site archive to be deposited with Somerset County Museum.

8.3 Copies of this report will be deposited with the client/agent and included as part of the Somerset Historic Environment Record.

8.4 In compliance with condition (f) of the Scheduled Monument Consent (S29180), an OASIS (On-line Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations - <http://oasis.ac.uk/england>) has been completed and the digital project report deposited with the Archaeology Data Service, via the OASIS form.

## 9. COAS acknowledgements

9.1 We would like to thank the following for their contribution to the successful completion of this project:

Mel Barge, Inspector of Ancient Monuments, English Heritage  
Chris Brown, Bursar, Kings of Wessex Academy

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Somerset County Council, English  
Heritage, N.D.

*Monument Management Plan - Kings of Wessex  
School, Cheddar. Roman settlement site, Anglo-  
Saxon and Norman royal palace and St Columbanus'  
Chapel*