

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

A Programme of Archaeological Monitoring and Recording - Phase 2



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

A Programme of Archaeological Monitoring and Recording

for

The Kings of Wessex Academy

by



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Non-technical summary

Context One Archaeological Services (COAS) carried out a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording at The Kings of Wessex Academy, Station Road, Cheddar, Somerset (the 'Site'), over seven days between 10 and 19 December 2014. The project was commissioned by Mr C Richardson (Head teacher) 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) during groundworks for a minor extension as part of new kitchen/dining facilities. The Site lies within an area where significant archaeology was thought to have survived, as defined in the Monument Management Plan for the school. COAS previously carried out an archaeological evaluation on the Site in September 2014. The evaluation concluded that despite the potential for significant Roman, Saxon and medieval remains on the Site, very little archaeological evidence was exposed. The evidence 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, the presence of this feature provided an indicator of the horizon at which other archaeological remains may have been expected.

Despite the potential for discovering archaeological remains, the programme of archaeological monitoring and recording exposed very little archaeological evidence. No features of archaeological interest were present, and those exposed were most likely modern in origin. These comprised three rectangular features thought to represent late 20th century flowerbeds and a ditch which is coterminous with an east to west aligned field boundary depicted on historic mapping until 1930 and present until the school's construction in 1960. The single unexcavated feature identified in Tr1 during the evaluation, and interpreted as a possible Romano-British ditch or pit, was similar in character to the flower beds. Finds were limited to a small assemblage of Romano-British and post-medieval pottery, fragments of animal bone, an undiagnostic iron artefact and single fragments of Romano-British glass and Ceramic Building Material (CBM). These finds were residual and were likely dispersed throughout the fills of the modern features through construction and landscaping work.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Context One Archaeological Services Ltd (COAS) carried out a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording at The Kings of Wessex Academy, Station Road, Cheddar, Somerset (the 'Site'), over 7 days between 10 and 19 December 2014. The project was commissioned by Mr C Richardson (Head teacher) 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) during groundworks for a minor extension as part of new kitchen/dining facilities. Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) was granted on 25 November 2014 (ref. S00098138) 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 An archaeological evaluation was carried out on the Site by COAS in September 2014. The evaluation report concluded that:
- "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."*
- 1.5 The evaluation comprised four elements: the production of a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) which set out the project strategy; a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording; post-excavation and report production; and archive deposition. The WSI was submitted in support of the Scheduled Monument Consent application and approved on 19 November 2014.

2. Site location and topography

- 2.1 The Site (centred on NGR ST 45789 53091) covered 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. Prior to development works, the Site was occupied by a patio with some small bushes. The western side of the Site was 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.
- 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 3rd or 4th 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-1st to the 4th 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; 1st - 2nd centuries AD and 3rd - 4th 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 3rd to 4th 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 1st and 2nd 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.

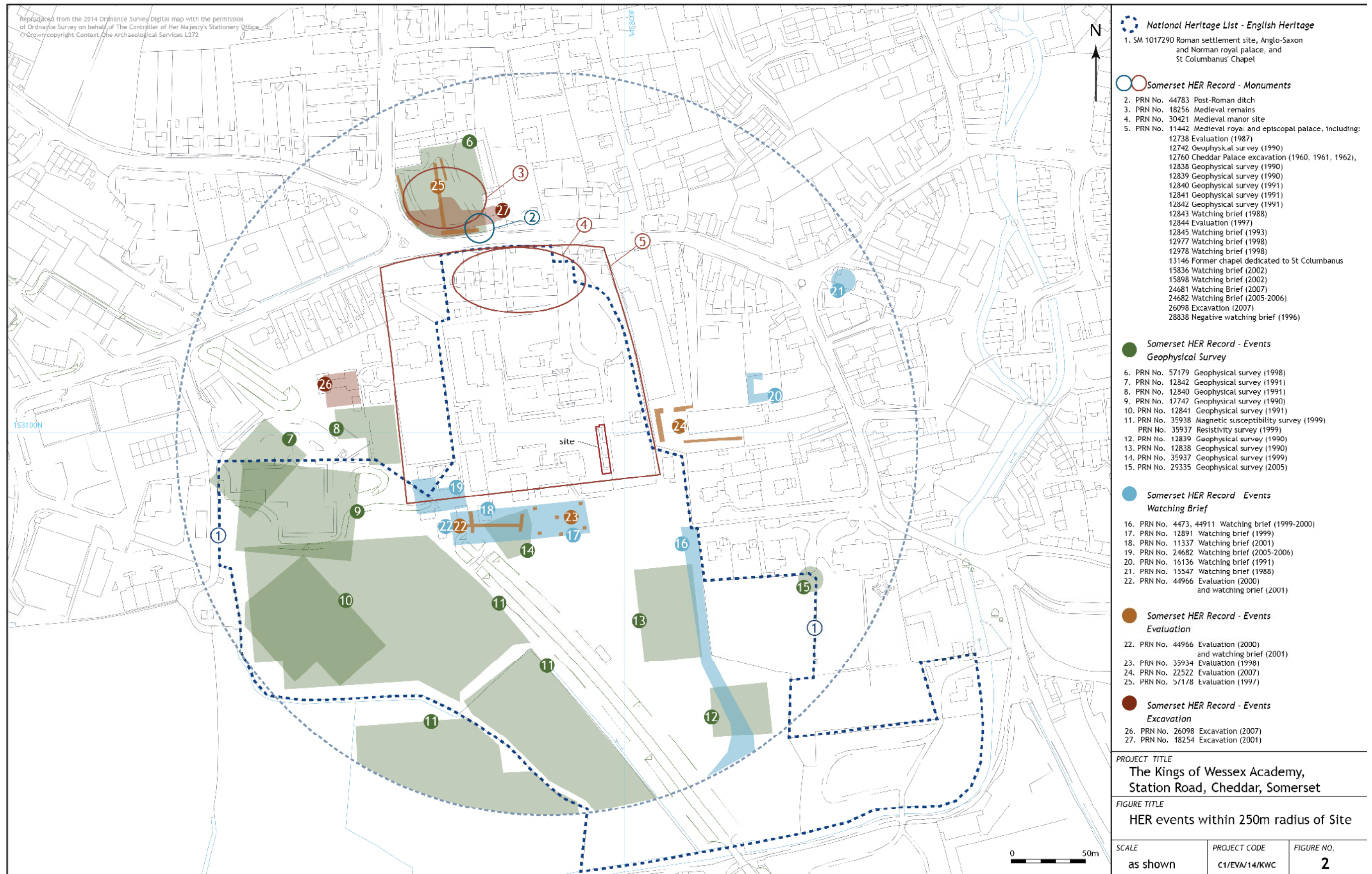


Figure 2. HER events within 250m radius of Site



Figure 3. West facing section of foundation trench

- 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-10th 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 10th century and was predated by a substantial long hall (c. 24m x 6.1m), and two, probably contemporary, minor buildings. In the 10th 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 11th century, and the West Hall was again rebuilt in the 12th century. During the 12th century the West Hall was replaced with a larger structure to the east, the East Hall. In the 13th or 14th 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 17th century the chapel was converted into a dwelling, which continued to be occupied until the early 20th 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

Development groundworks methodology

- 4.1 The entire Site area of 180m² was stripped and a trench measuring c. 30.0m x 1.20m x 0.70m was excavated to expose potential archaeological features and services (**Figures 1 & 3; Plate 1**). A machine equipped with 1.60m and 0.90m wide toothless buckets was used to carry out all groundwork excavations.

Archaeological methodology

- 4.2 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.
- 4.3 All features and deposits were drawn on dimensionally stable media at scales of 1:20 (plans) and 1:10 (sections) including representative sections and plans of the trench.
- 4.4 All archaeological remains were sampled by manual excavation to establish stratigraphic relationships, recover sufficient artefacts to establish 'absolute' dates, and to determine feature/deposit morphology and character. All features/deposits were recorded using standard COAS *pro-forma* recording sheets. Stratigraphic relationships were recorded using a "Harris-Winchester matrix" diagram. Soil colours were logged using a Munsell soil colour chart.
- 4.5 A photographic record of the work was prepared and involved the use of digital images and monochrome prints. This included shots of the excavated area, individual features and working shots to illustrate the nature of the archaeological operation mounted.

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 (100) measuring 0.30m to 0.50m deep comprising mixed silty clays, sand and building rubble (**Plate 2**). This overlay a

make-up layer (101) measuring 0.20m deep and consisting of dark brown loamy clay soil with iron mottling, above a yellowish brown silty clay natural (102).

Features

- 5.3 Three shallow (0.15m - 0.20m) cut features [103] [105] [107] were present at the north and south ends of the foundation trench, thought to represent modern flower beds. Features [103] and [105] were recorded in the west facing section (see **Figure 3**), while feature [107] was observed in the east facing section which was otherwise blank and therefore not reproduced here. These features were similar in form (and fill) to the single feature [103] identified during the 2014 COAS evaluation works in the south of the Site, although the feature was unexcavated. A steep-sided ditch [109] (measuring 2.10m wide and 0.45m deep) was exposed at the northern end of the trench (**Plates 3 & 4**) aligned east-west and cut by a modern service to the north. The projected route of this ditch would have passed through Trench 2 of the 2014 evaluation. However, the ditch was not observed during these earlier works, and may have been truncated by modern services at its western extent.
- 5.4 A small number of pottery sherds and a single glass fragment were recovered from the fills (104) (106) of two of the flowerbed features [103] [105], while pottery, animal bone, an iron artefact and a single CBM fragment were identified within the basal fill (111) of the ditch [109]



Plate 1. General shot showing machine excavated trench (from S; 1m & 2m scales)



Plate 2. West facing section of machine excavated trench (from W; 0.5m & 1m scales)



Plate 3. West facing section of feature [109] (from W; 0.5m & 1m scales)



Plate 4. South facing section of feature [109] showing deposition sequence (from S; 0.5m & 1m scales)

6. The finds

Pottery and Ceramic Building Material (CBM), by Cheryl Green

- 6.1 A total of 43 sherds weighing 305.2g, were recovered from three contexts (see **Table 1**). The assemblage dates to the Romano-British and post-medieval periods. The sherds from contexts 104 and 106 are all Romano-British and are in an abraded condition ranging from fair to poor with an average sherd size of 6.7g. The body sherds are all in a reduced, sandy fabric. Seventeen sherds were recovered from context 111; these comprised one abraded base sherd of Romano-British

greyware and sixteen glazed post-medieval and modern wares with both abraded and un-abraded sherds with an average sherd size of 10.8g. A single small piece of heavily abraded Romano-British CBM weighing 15g was recovered from context 106. No further work is required on this assemblage.

Context	Fabric	Date	Number	Weight (g)
104	Coarsewares	RB	2	38
104	Black burnished ware	RB	6	14.4
104	Red fineware	RB	2	4
104	Greyware	RB	10	51.4
106	Red fineware	RB	1	1.1
106	Samian ware	RB	1	1.3
106	Black burnished ware	RB	4	13
111	Greyware	RB	1	10
111	Glazed wares	PM	8	106
111	Glazed wares	MOD	8	66
			43	305.2

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

Other finds, Cheryl Green

- 6.2 Six fragments of animal bone were recovered from context 111 weighing a total of 104g, comprising cow, pig and a single cat bone. A single Fe object weighing 30g was recovered from context 111. This comprised two twisted pieces of iron with interlinked loops. A small corner of a slate tile from the same context weighing 36g has a machine-cut edge and is modern. A tiny abraded shard of turquoise-coloured glass weighing 1.1g was retrieved from context 104; this contained small air-bubbles and is likely to be Romano-British or Saxon.

7. Discussion

- 7.1 Despite the potential for discovering archaeological remains, the programme of archaeological monitoring and recording exposed very little archaeological evidence. No features of archaeological interest were present, and those exposed were most likely modern in origin comprising three shallow rectangular features and a steep sided ditch. The rectangular features are thought to represent flowerbeds and may relate to three dashed lined rectangular features depicted in the area on Ordnance Survey (OS) mapping dating between 1977 and 1988. The single unexcavated feature identified in Tr1 during the evaluation, and interpreted as a possible Romano-British ditch or pit, was similar in character and may represent a further flower bed. The ditch is coterminous with an east to west aligned field boundary depicted on historic mapping until 1930 and present until the school's construction in 1960. Finds were limited to a small assemblage of Romano-British and post-medieval pottery, fragments of animal bone, an undiagnostic iron artefact and single fragments of Romano-British glass and Ceramic Building Material (CBM). These finds were residual and were likely dispersed throughout the fills of the modern features through construction and landscaping work.

8. Archive

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

Item	Number	Format
Context sheets	15	Paper
Context summary	1	Paper
Fieldwork notes - day record	7	Paper
Environmental recording sheets	6	Paper
Graphics register	1	Paper

Level summary	1	Paper
Photographic register	1	Paper
Drawings	6	Permatrace
Digital images	30	.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. The artefacts will be returned to the Site landowners, Kings of Wessex Academy.
- 8.3 Copies of this report will be deposited with the client/agent, English Heritage and included as part of the Somerset Historic Environment Record.
- 8.4 In compliance with condition (f) of the Scheduled Monument Consent (S00098138), 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
Mike Gillingham, M B R Gillingham Ltd.
Staff at Kings of Wessex Academy

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Appendix 1. Context summary

CONTEXT NO.	PERIOD	TYPE	DESCRIPTION	INTERPRETATION	EARLIER THAN	CONTEMP. WITH	LATER THAN
100	-	Horizon	Layer of building rubble	Overburden	-	-	101
101	-	Horizon	Dark brown clay loam subsoil	Buried soil	100	-	102
102	-	Horizon	Yellowish brown clay	Natural	101	-	-
103	PM	Cut	Steep sided cut with flat base	Cut of flower bed	101	-	102
104	-	Fill	Dark brow loamy clay	Fill of flower bed	100	-	103
105	PM	Cut	Steep sided cut with flat base	Cut of flower bed	101	-	102
106	-	Fill	Dark brow loamy clay	Fill of flower bed	100	-	105
107	PM	Cut	Very truncated	Cut of flower bed	101	-	102
108	-	Fill	Dark brown loamy clay	Fill of flower bed	100	-	107
109	PM	Cut	Steep sided with irregular stepping	Cut of ditch	101	-	102
110	-	Fill	Dark brown clay loam	Part of basal ditch [109]	112	111	109
111	-	Fill	Black clay loam	Main basal fill of ditch [109]	112	110	109
112	-	Fill	Yellowish brown loamy clay	Upper fill of ditch [109]	113	-	110, 111
113	-	Fill	Dark brown, slightly silty, loamy clay	Uppermost fill of ditch [109]	100	-	112
114	-	Fill	Dark brown clay loam	Fill of ditch [109]	100	--	109