

**Archaeological watching brief
at
Overbury First School,
School Lane,
Overbury,
Worcestershire**



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Worcestershire Archaeology
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Archaeological watching brief at Overbury Church of England First School, Overbury, Worcestershire

Richard Bradley and Graham Arnold

With contributions by Rob Hedge, Elizabeth Pearson and Gaynor Western

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Overbury First School, Overbury, Worcestershire (NGR SO 9583 3723). It was commissioned by Speller Metcalfe Gloucester Ltd who is running the development works on site. This involves the demolition of some existing structures and the construction of new buildings with pedestrian access, including associated landscaping, for which a planning application was agreed by Wychavon District Council

The development site was considered to include potential heritage assets associated with the medieval settlement of Overbury, in addition to being located close to a series of cropmarks representing a probable trackway with conjoined enclosures, thought to be of prehistoric origin (WSM 29223).

Two phases of work were undertaken on site; an initial stage of fieldwork was undertaken in August 2013 and involved the observation of an area of ground reduction. This was reported on by Worcestershire Archaeology in September 2013. Subsequently, groundworks taking place on site in February 2014, at a greater depth than observed in August 2013, disturbed human remains in two places. The police were informed by the contractors and a forensics team investigated, before informing Worcestershire Archaeology. Archaeological investigations resumed on site and further ground reduction and the excavation of a trench for the installation of a retaining wall was monitored in March 2014.

The archaeological remains discovered are considered to be of Roman date, representative of small scale agricultural activity in the form of field systems, alongside associated inhumation burials. The trackway feature was not revealed and no settlement site was identified, but the presence of burials would suggest occupation in close proximity. The two burials were adult individuals, probably a male and a female, both of whom exhibited signs of a physical lifestyle. Hobnails found in one of the graves are characteristic of rural Roman burial and are often associated with an agricultural role, which correlates with the other evidence. Despite the severe truncation and disturbance it was determined that one of the inhumations could have been a decapitation burial. Full osteological analysis was undertaken and the specialist report is appended.

Report

1 Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Overbury First School, Overbury, Worcestershire (NGR SO 9583 3723). It was commissioned by Speller Metcalfe Gloucester Ltd in response to a brief prepared by the Planning Advisory Service of Worcestershire County Council (WCC 2013). The development works involved the demolition of some existing structures and the construction of new buildings with pedestrian access, including associated landscaping, for which a planning application was approved by Wychavon District Council (reference 12/02479 and 12/02480)

The development site was considered to include potential heritage assets associated with the medieval settlement of Overbury, in addition to being close to a cropmarks identified as a trackway with conjoined enclosures, thought to be of prehistoric origin and which was predicted to extend into the area of the school buildings (WSM 29223). Based on the known evidence, it was determined that the potential heritage assets were unlikely to be of such significance as to warrant pre-determination evaluation or preservation *in situ* and could be effectively dealt with during a conditional programme of archaeological work (WCC 2013).

The project conforms to the brief prepared by the Planning Advisory Service of Worcestershire County Council (WCC 2013) and for which a project proposal (including detailed specification) was produced (WA 2013).

The project also conforms to the *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IfA 2008) and the *Standards and guidelines for archaeological projects in Worcestershire* (WCC 2010).

The event reference for this project given by the HER is WSM 49657.

2 Aims

The aim of the watching brief was to observe and record archaeological deposits, and to determine their extent, state of preservation, date and type, as far as reasonably possible.

3 Methods

3.1 Personnel

The project was undertaken by Richard Bradley (BA (hons.); MA; AlfA), Graham Arnold (BA (hons.); MSc), Michael Nicholson (BSc (hons.)) and Peter Lovett (BSc (hons.)). The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Vaughan (BA (hons.); MA; AlfA). Illustrations were prepared by Carolyn Hunt (BSc; PG Cert; MIfA). Rob Hedge (MA (Cantab.)) contributed the finds analysis, Elizabeth Pearson (MSc; AlfA) the environmental information and Gaynor Western (BA (hons.); MSc) the osteological analysis.

3.2 Documentary research

Prior to fieldwork commencing a search was made of the Historic Environment Record (HER) within a 500m radius of the site, which detailed the numerous listed buildings, scheduled monuments and heritage assets in the surrounding area (Figs 7 and 8).

Comprehensive background information for the environs of the site can also be found in reports resulting from a number of developer-funded, heritage assessment and research-led archaeological projects that have taken place across the area in the second half of the 20th century and in more recent years (see for example, Miller 2010a and 2010b; Thomas 2005, 1-4; Dinn and Evans 1990; Webster and Hobley 1964). Selected relevant published and grey literature sources are listed in the bibliography.

3.3 Fieldwork strategy

A detailed specification was prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2013). An initial stage of fieldwork was undertaken between 13 and 20 August 2013 and involved the observation of a 50m by 25m area of ground reduction for foundations, 0.50m below the ground surface. This area is indicated on Figure 2. Monitoring was undertaken during and after machine excavation and exposed surfaces were sufficiently clean to observe well-differentiated archaeological deposits, though any less clear may not have been identified. Further test pits, 2.5m in length and 0.60m in width, were dug with the machine up to 1m below the ground surface into the natural substrate so as to be certain of its nature. This was reported on by Worcestershire Archaeology in September 2013 (Arnold 2013).

On 25 February 2014 groundworks taking place on site at a greater depth than observed in August 2013, disturbed human remains. The police were informed by the contractors and a forensics team investigated, sealed off the area, then excavated and removed an inhumation burial. Three days later a second burial was disturbed during groundworks and the police re-attended the site before informing Worcestershire Archaeology of the situation, who determined that the remains (and likely those previously removed) were ancient and in need of controlled archaeological excavation. Subsequently, fieldwork resumed on the site and further ground reduction and the excavation of a trench for the installation of a retaining wall was monitored between the 3 and 11 March 2014. The area of this work is also indicated on Figure 2.

Deposits considered not to be significant were removed using a 360° tracked excavator, employing a toothless bucket and under constant archaeological supervision. Where necessary, further excavation was undertaken by hand. Clean surfaces were inspected and all deposits were investigated in order to retrieve artefactual material and environmental samples, as well as to determine their nature. Features and deposits were recorded according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012).

3.4 Structural analysis

All fieldwork records were checked and cross-referenced. Analysis was effected through a combination of structural, artefactual and ecofactual evidence, allied to the information derived from other sources.

3.5 Artefact methodology, by Rob Hedge

3.5.1 Recovery policy

The artefact recovery policy conformed to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012).

3.5.2 Method of analysis

All hand-retrieved finds were examined. They were identified, quantified and dated to period. A *terminus post quem* date was produced for each stratified context. The date was used for determining the broad date of phases defined for the site. All information was recorded on *pro forma* sheets.

The pottery and ceramic building material was examined under x20 magnification and referenced as appropriate by fabric type and form according to the fabric reference series maintained by the Service (Hurst and Rees 1992 and www.worcestershireceramics.org).

3.5.3 Discard policy

The following categories/types of material will be discarded after a period of 6 months following the submission of this report, unless there is a specific request to retain them (and subject to the collection policy of the relevant depository):

- where unstratified, including fieldwalked material;

- post-medieval pottery, and;
- generally where material has been assessed as having no obvious grounds for retention.

3.6 Environmental archaeology methodology, by Elizabeth Pearson

3.6.1 Sampling policy

Samples were taken according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). A total of 4 samples (each of 10 litres) were taken from the deposit (2005) around and below skeleton (2006) which is likely to be of Roman date.

3.6.2 Processing and analysis

The samples were processed by flotation using a Siraf tank. The flots were collected on a 300µm sieve and the residue retained on a 1mm mesh. This allows for the recovery of items such as small animal bones, molluscs and seeds.

The residues were fully sorted by eye and the abundance of each category of environmental remains estimated. A magnet was also used to test for the presence of hammer scale. The flots were scanned using a low power MEIJI stereo light microscope and plant remains identified using modern reference collections maintained by Worcestershire Archaeology, and a seed identification manual (Cappers *et al* 2012). Nomenclature for the plant remains follows the *New Flora of the British Isles*, 3rd edition (Stace 2010).

A small assemblage of hand-collected animal bone was quantified according to count and weight (g), but no further work was carried out.

3.6.3 Discard policy

Residues and sorted remains (apart from human remains) will be discarded 6 months after the submission of this report.

3.7 Human remains methodology, by Gaynor Western

3.7.1 Method of analysis

The skeletal material was analysed according to the standards laid out in the guidelines recommended by the British Association of Biological Anthropologists and Osteologists in conjunction with the IfA (Guidelines to the Standards for Recording Human Remains, Brickley and McKinley (eds) 2004) as well as by English Heritage (Human Bones from Archaeological Sites: Guidelines for producing assessment documents and analytical reports, Centre for Archaeology Guidelines, 2002).

Recording of the material was carried out using the recognised descriptions contained in Standards for Data Collection from Human Skeletal Remains by Buikstra and Ubelaker (1994). The material was analysed macroscopically and where necessary with the aid of a magnifying glass for identification purposes. It was analysed without prior knowledge of associated artefacts so that the assessment remained as objective as possible. Comparison of the results was made with published osteological data from contemporary skeletal populations.

3.7.2 Reasons for the analysis

The osteological analysis was carried out to ascertain:

- An inventory of the skeletal material
- Condition of bone present
- Completeness of the skeleton

-
- Age Assessment
 - Sex Determination
 - Non-metric Traits
 - Stature and Morphometric Data
 - Skeletal Pathology
 - Dental Pathology

3.8 Statement of confidence in the methods and results

Having undertaken the project the following comments may be made with regard to the methods adopted. The first stage of work was archaeologically monitored to a sufficient level and can be considered to have been completed effectively. Removal of archaeological deposits and human remains subsequently took place at a later date before archaeologists were informed and monitoring resumed. Therefore, only moderate confidence can be attached to the overall conclusions of the project.

4 The application site

4.1 Topography, geology and current land-use

The site was previously in use as a tarmac playground to the rear of the existing school buildings, first opened in 1877, which bound the site to the north, and covers approximately 0.2ha in total area. This has previously been heavily landscaped into a slightly raised and levelled area, but overall the ground gradually slopes from around 67.95m AOD at the north of the site to 66.75m AOD in the south. Residential properties form the western boundary of the site and a school nursery defines the eastern edge. Both arable and pasture fields exist to the south.

Geologically, the area is mapped with underlying deposits of the Charmouth Mudstone Formation dated to the Jurassic period, and superficial deposits of Head clays, silts and gravels (BGS 2000). The soils on across the site are defined as the brown, well-drained loamy and clayey soils of the Badsey Association (Ragg *et al* 1984, 86).

4.2 Archaeological context

Overbury is a small village located just off the southern slopes of Bredon Hill, around 6 miles south-west of Evesham, and has developed around the church (WSM 07655) and Overbury Court (WSM 12988) alongside the road linking Kemerton in the west to Conderton in the east (VCH 1913, 468). It has late Saxon origins and the manor of Overbury is reported to have been given to the monks of Worcester by Ceowulf II, King of Mercia, in 875 (VCH III, 469). Domesday records identify six hides, fifteen villagers, seven smallholders and eleven ploughs at Overbury in 1086 (Thorn and Thorn 1982). The village developed throughout the medieval and post-medieval periods (WSM 24935; WSM 24474) and a number of listed buildings exist in the vicinity of the site representative of this development. The medieval church of St Faith was established in the 11th century and partly rebuilt in the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries; it is now a Grade I listed structure (WSM 07655; English Heritage List Entry 1167601). There are over 50 other historic buildings in the village, mostly of 17th to 19th century date, of which 37 are Grade II listed. This includes the main school building on the site itself (WSM 12987). Overbury village is a conservation area, first designated in 1972, and is located within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), designated in 1966.

Outside of the village, the surrounding landscape is rich in archaeological remains; in particular there are examples of medieval ridge and furrow ploughing in close proximity to the settlement (WSM 07988; WSM 09795; WSM 09801; WSM 10057; WSM 10058). Archaeological sites identified across the area from cropmark evidence are also prevalent and are largely visible as enclosures in various forms (rectangular, sub-rectangular, irregular), a pattern common to the West

Midlands more generally and typical of early rural settlement in the region. Around 400m to the south-east of the site is a double-ditched enclosure thought to be of prehistoric date, registered as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (WSM 05097; SAM 1005311), and 300m to the south-west are a series of enclosure cropmarks dated to the Iron Age (WSM 29229; WSM 29230). These are likely to be associated with a sinuous trackway feature and pit alignment (WSM 29233), previously investigated by WA during archaeological risk assessment of cultivation practices on the Overbury estate (identified as COSMIC+, see Miller 2010a; WSM 44952). This feature is projected to extend into the wider area of the school building.

Similar COSMIC+ projects undertaken by WA on and around Bredon Hill have also assessed cultivation risk on a multitude of other cropmark sites across this area. This work demonstrated the presence of a large number of farmstead enclosures and field systems, particularly examples of Roman date, in the vicinity of Overbury (see, for example, Miller 2010a and 2010b; WSM 44952). These are elements of a complex palimpsest of archaeological monuments south of Bredon Hill and located on the edge of gravel terracing within the valley of the Carrant Brook, a smaller tributary of the River Avon that forms the southern boundary to Overbury parish (see Webster and Hobley 1964). The close proximity of Bredon Hill is also significant due to the sheer number, variety and importance of the archaeological sites that exist here. Around 1.5km north-east of the site and lying on the south facing slopes of the hill is Conderon Camp, an Iron Age hillfort and a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 1005327). Excavations dated this to around the 5th century BC and identified extensive occupation within the defended area until the 2nd century (Thomas 2005). Further to the north, Bredon Hill is also defined by the presence of Kemerton Camp, another Iron Age hillfort and Scheduled Ancient Monument dated to around the 3rd or 2nd century BC (SAM 1005331). The entrance was excavated in the 1930s and a 'massacre level' was identified, with skeletal remains demonstrating evidence of trauma, a burnt layer and associated weapon finds discovered. These were recently dated to an episode of conflict in the mid-2nd to mid-1st century BC (Western and Hurst 2014, 161-184).

Individual archaeological finds are also common to the area. In 1907, an unstratified Palaeolithic hand axe was recovered from approximately 270m to the south-east of the site (WSM 04665) and coins, pottery and building stone of Roman origin have been found in the same location (WSM 26755). During archaeological watching brief observations of a new power line route in 1997, Roman pottery fragments and a single box flue tile were found around 400m to the south of the site, and a sherd of 13-14th century cooking pot was found 150m closer to the village (Topping 1998; WSM 29606).

5 Structural analysis

The areas observed and features recorded are shown in Figures 2-6. The results of the structural analysis are presented in Appendix 1.

5.1.1 Phase 1: Natural deposits

Natural deposits were observed in a number of locations across the site area (104; 2002). During ground reduction, moderately compact light yellow limestone brash with some lenses of greyish brown sandy clays were encountered from between 0.32m and 0.50m below the modern ground level. Higher up the slightly sloping ground, when the trench for a retaining wall was excavated, this natural substrate was observed at approximately 0.25m below the modern surface.

5.1.2 Phase 2: Roman deposits

It was possible to attribute the majority of archaeological features found on the site to the Roman period. These were all encountered during the second phase of work and were mostly revealed during deeper groundworks before an archaeologist was present on site.

Two north to south aligned grave features [2004] and [2007] were recorded (Figure 6). The first of these, [2004], had been heavily truncated by the machine and then excavated during a police

forensic examination without archaeological involvement. It was reported that this was an extended supine burial with arms folded over the abdomen, and included hobnails found by the left foot of the individual. The presence of hobnails was the only indication of a Roman date for the burial, although this is not definitive, as no other finds were recovered. The grave cut was subsequently recorded during archaeological work on site and found to have survived to a depth of 0.12m, 2m long and 0.54m in width. The northern end of the grave was slightly deeper and formed a circular depression from which a sub-round moderately sized stone may have been removed during the earlier police investigation. This is thought to have been a pillow stone.

The second grave, [2007], was less disturbed, but had still been heavily truncated by a machine before an archaeologist was present on site. It was positioned around 6m to the west of the first grave and, based on association with this, was also considered to be of Roman origin despite a lack of absolute dating evidence. The upper half of the articulated remains of an inhumation (2006) had survived the truncation and appeared to be an extended, supine burial that may have had the head positioned by the lower legs, where fragments of skull were found. The grave cut as it survived did not appear large enough in size to accommodate a fully extended body with the skull in an anatomically correct position, although this may have been a result of the recent disturbance. Only the upper torso and fragments of pelvis and left hand had survived this disturbance and were located within the grave. However, a substantial number of disarticulated remains were recovered from spoil heaps adjacent to this burial (2008) once archaeological monitoring commenced. These were bagged and recorded separately for identification purposes but comprised a number of elements not found in situ, including the lower arms, legs and skull fragments. It is considered that these remains were of the same individual as (2006), and the osteological analysis supports this interpretation (Section 5.4 and Appendix 3). Enough of the backfill of the grave (2005) was present for environmental sampling of this burial. This identified additional small pieces of human bone, as well as some copper alloy flakes suggesting that a decayed object was once present in the grave, but little information was derived from the plant remains as they were considered to be intrusive.

Around 12m to the north-east of the graves, although truncated, was a ditch feature aligned north-west to south-east [2012] (Figure 4). Only a small portion of this was visible but it was clear in the section of the ground reduction area that it was around 0.94m in depth and at least 0.33m wide. The fill (2011) was sterile and homogenous throughout and largely lacking in finds, although two small fragments of Roman pottery were recovered. The absence of cultural material is suggestive of a feature some a distance from direct occupation activity and it is likely that the ditch marks a field boundary or potentially, given the presence of burials, is a cemetery boundary. A further small linear feature, identified as a drainage gully, was found in the western part of the ground reduction area and may also have been part of a field system [2017] (Figure 5). This was only 0.14m in depth and 0.38m in width and appeared to terminate in the site area. The fill contained a small fragment of Roman pottery of general 1st to 4th century date.

An area of disturbed ground (2015) of ill-defined extent was identified close to a modern service trench that transected the site. This contained Late Iron Age or early Roman Malvernian pottery and some animal bone, suggesting that this may have been a feature but had been damaged during modern landscaping of the site.

5.1.3 Phase 3: Undated deposits

A small irregular pit feature, of very shallow depth (0.06m) due to truncation, was observed in the eastern part of the ground reduction area [2010]. This did not contain any dating evidence and was difficult to interpret because of its poor survival, but could potentially relate to the Roman activity on the site.

5.1.4 Phase 4: Modern deposits

A series of deposits and features could be identified as modern in origin. This included a drain feature [108] filled with topsoil and concrete and a brick and concrete footing for a flagpole (105), previously extant in the school playground. Reworked soils of redeposited natural and made

ground deposits underlay the surfacing for the modern playground and a number of modern fence posts were encountered, one of which was excavated and recorded [2014] to determine its nature.

5.2 Artefactual analysis, by Rob Hedge

The artefactual assemblage recovered is summarised in Tables 1–3.

The assemblage came from seven stratified contexts and could be dated from the late Iron Age/early Roman period onwards (see Table 1). Using pottery as an index of artefact condition, this was generally average with the majority of sherds displaying moderate levels of abrasion. The mean sherd size was 10.4g, which is considered average.

Period	Material class	Material subtype	Object specific type	Count	Weight(g)
early Roman	ceramic		pot	1	16
late med/early post-med	ceramic		tile	1	14
LIA/ERB	ceramic		pot	4	28
post-medieval	ceramic		brick/tile	1	4
Roman	ceramic		plate(oven)	1	52
Roman	ceramic		pot	10	71
Roman	metal	iron	nail	18	6
undated	metal	iron	nail	1	4
			TOTALS:	37	195

Table 1: Quantification of the assemblage

Broad period	Fabric code	Fabric common name	Count	Weight(g)
Roman	3.1	Slab-built Malvernian ware	1	52
Iron Age?-Roman	3.2	Malvernian later Iron Age and early Roman ware	4	28
Roman	12	Severn Valley ware	7	53
Roman	12.2	Oxidised organically tempered Severn Valley ware	1	12
Roman	22	Black-burnished ware, type 1 (BB1)	3	22
		TOTALS:	16	167

Table 2: Quantification of the pottery by fabric

Summary of artefactual evidence by period

For the finds from individual features, including specific types of pottery, see Tables 3 and 2 in that order and in combination.

The discussion below is a summary of the finds, and associated location or contexts by period. Where possible, dates have been allocated and the importance of individual finds commented upon as necessary.

Late Iron Age/Early Roman

Four body sherds of 1st century BC to 2nd century AD Malvernian tubby cooking pot (fabric 3.2) were recovered from an area of disturbed ground (2015) possibly representing a feature truncated

by modern landscaping. One sherd exhibits faint traces of burnished pattern in the form of an acute lattice topped with two parallel horizontal bands, spaced 7mm apart.

Roman

The remainder of the pottery assemblage is Roman in date. From the topsoil (2000), an abraded body sherd of organic tempered oxidised Severn Valley Ware (fabric 12.2) of 1st/2nd century date was recovered, along with two body sherds and a rim sherd of Black Burnished Ware Type 1 (fabric 22). The moderate degree to which the rim is everted suggests a date of 120-150 AD (Laura Griffin, pers comm). A base sherd of an oxidised Severn Valley Ware (fabric 12) tankard was also recovered from (2000), exhibiting a basal groove indicative of a mid-1st to early 2nd century date.

The subsoil (2001) contained a base sherd of an oxidised Severn Valley Ware (fabric 12) bowl, and two body sherds of the same fabric, of indeterminate form. All were moderately abraded, and of 1st-4th century date.

Also within the subsoil was a fragment of an oven plate of hand-made, slab-built Malvernian ware (fabric 3.1), with characteristic smooth upper surface and rough, sandy underside. These are generally considered to be 3rd/4th century in date.

A single small, abraded body sherd of oxidised Severn Valley Ware (fabric 12) of 1st-4th century date was recovered from the fill (2016) of linear feature [2017]. Two very small, highly abraded sherds of the same fabric were present within the fill (2011) of ditch [2012].

A scatter of hobnails recovered from the fill (2003) of grave [2004] by the police forensic investigators appears to have been found adjacent to the left foot of the skeleton. The nails correspond to Manning's (1985) 'Type 10', consistent with a Roman date for the burial. A minimum number of 14 nails were present, exhibiting heavy corrosion. No nails were reported from the vicinity of the right foot.

Medieval/Post-medieval

A single fragment of tile was recovered from the topsoil (2000). The fabric is reddish-orange with a reduced core and contains <1mm quartzite inclusions. A mottled olive-green to brown glaze is evident on both sides, and c.30% of a circular hole (>12mm diameter) forms one of the edges of the piece. It is considered likely to be late medieval/early post-medieval in date, but no definitive identification was possible.

Post-medieval

The fill (2013) of post-hole [2014] contained a single very small fragment of post-medieval brick. The small size precludes detailed identification but it is considered unlikely to be earlier than 19th century in date.

Undated

An iron pin/nail was recovered from disturbed grave fill (2003). It was 27mm in length, with a flat, rectangular-sectioned tapering stem and a 'wedge'-shaped profile, with a marked 'shoulder' and square top. It does not appear to correspond to any known Roman types (Manning 1985) and appears markedly less corroded than the iron hobnails from the same context. Given the extent of disturbance within this feature, it is considered highly likely that this is an intrusive find.

Context	Material class	Material subtype	Object specific type	Count	Weight (g)	Start date	End date	Tpq date range
2000	ceramic		pot	3	22	120	150	1200–1800
	ceramic		pot	1	16	43	150	
	ceramic		pot	1	12	43	200	
	ceramic		tile	1	14	1200	1800	
2001	ceramic		pot	1	4	43	400	200–400

	ceramic		pot	2	30	43	400	
	ceramic		plate(oven)	1	52	200	400	
2003	metal	iron	nail	1	4			43–400
	metal	iron	nail	18	6	43	400	
2011	ceramic		pot	2	2	43	400	43–400
2013	ceramic		brick/tile	1	4	1600	1950	1600–1950
2015	ceramic		pot	4	28	-100	200	100B.C.–200A.D.
2016	ceramic		pot	1	1	43	400	43–400

Table 3: Summary of context dating based on artefacts

5.3 Environmental analysis, by Elizabeth Pearson

The environmental evidence recovered is summarised in Tables 4 and 5.

5.3.1 Hand-collected animal bone

A small assemblage of well-preserved animal bone, comprising 11 fragments (76g), was recovered from the topsoil (2000). No further work was carried out on this assemblage.

5.3.2 Macrofossil remains

A moderate amount of human bone was recovered from sample <200> from around skeleton (2006), but only occasional charred cereal grains, including hulled barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) and occasional small mammal bones were contemporary with the grave fill. Uncharred seed remains (Table 5) and mollusc remains are likely to be intrusive. The mollusc remains were predominantly semi-transparent burrowing snails, whilst the uncharred plant remains are unlikely to have survived in the soil for any significant length of time. As a result, little interpretation could be made of the plant macrofossil or small mammal bone remains.

Context	Sample	Sub-sample	Human bone	Small mammal	mollusc	charcoal	charred plant	uncharred plant	hammerscale	Comment
2005	201	1		occ	abt*			occ		
2005	201	2	occ		abt*	occ		occ	Occ	occ pot/CBM, Cu alloy flake, flake hammerscale
2005	201	3	occ		abt*		occ	occ		occ Cu alloy flake
2005	200		mod		abt*	occ	occ			

Table 4: Summary of environmental remains

occ = occasional, mod = moderate, abt = abundant, * = mostly transparent, probably intrusive

Sample Sub-sample	Common name	Habitat	2005	2005	2005	2005
			201	201	201	200
			1	2	3	
Latin name	Family					
Uncharred plant remains						
<i>Persicaria maculosa</i>	Polygonaceae	redshank	AB	+		
<i>Chenopodium/Atriplex</i> sp	Amaranthaceae	goosefoot/orache	AB		+	

<i>Sambucus nigra</i>	Caprifoliaceae	elderberry	BC			+	
Charred plant remains							
<i>Hordeum vulgare</i> grain (hulled)	Poaceae	barley	F			+	
Cereal sp indet grain	Poaceae	cereal	F			+	
<i>Bromus</i> sp grain	Poaceae	brome grass	AF				+

Table 5: Plant remains from bulk samples

Habitat	Quantity
A= cultivated ground	+ = 1 - 10
B= disturbed ground	++ = 11- 50
C= woodlands, hedgerows, scrub etc	+++ = 51 - 100
D = grasslands, meadows and heathland	++++ = 101+
E = aquatic/wet habitats	
F = cultivar	

5.4 Analysis of human remains, by Gaynor Western

The specialist report containing a full analysis is provided as Appendix 3 (Ossafreelance 2014), but is presented in summary form here for the purposes of accessibility, alongside the other specialist contributions.

5.4.1 Skeletal inventory

No duplication of elements was observed within any one context and the inventory taken confirmed that each context contained the remains of a single individual. A number of bone fragments from context (2006) were reunited with fragments from context (2008), confirming that these two contexts contained the remains of the same individual.

5.4.2 Condition of the bone

The skeletal remains from grave [2004] and skeleton (2006/2008) were both recorded as being in 'good' condition, being scored as grades 1 and 2. Some surface erosion was noted in both skeletons around the epiphyses of the long bones but generally surface preservation was good, allowing for metric analysis and observation for pathological changes.

5.4.3 Completeness of skeletons

The skeleton from grave [2004] was between 25-50% complete. The grave had been disturbed during mechanical excavation and it is likely that some skeletal elements had been removed via this disturbance prior to in situ identification. No skull bones were present and the remains consisted primarily of fragmented long bones and torso elements from the lower half of the body. Some hand and foot elements had survived.

Skeleton (2006/2008) was over 75% complete despite similar mechanical disturbance, mainly due to retrieval of the disturbed skeletal remains by the on-site archaeologist. There was a notable absence of small bones, however, particularly those of the hand and feet. The cranial bones were also under-represented as were the cervical vertebrae. Those cranial bones recovered were located at the foot end of the grave. The larger bones recovered, including those in situ, were generally fragmented, due in part to the shallowness of the grave and the location of the skeleton close to the modern ground surface.

5.4.4 Age assessment

The skeleton from grave [2004] was an adult individual, estimated to have been aged over 50 years at death, based on observations of the auricular surface. All the observable epiphyses were fused. Dental attrition was unobservable. Overall, this individual was classified as an old adult.

Skeleton (2006/2008) was also an adult individual but unfortunately no specific age estimation could be undertaken due to the lack of observable elements. All the observable epiphyses were fused, including the medial end of the clavicle, suggesting that this individual was over 25-30 years old. Overall, the skeletal remains were classified as those of an adult.

5.4.5 Sex determination

Based upon morphological assessment, the skeleton from grave [2004] was classified as a 'possible female'. No skull was present but the observable sexually dimorphic features of the pelvis were female. However, the metric analysis of the femoral head resulted in the sex ascribed being indeterminate and the circumference of the tibia at the nutrient foramen was indicative of possible male sex. Although only a few morphological traits about the pelvis were observable, these were observed as definite female and are more reliable indicators than the metric analysis.

Skeleton (2006/2008) was similarly depleted of morphological indicators of sex. No features were observable in the pelvis and only three features were observable about the skull, two of which were indeterminate. However, metric analysis consistently indicated that the sex of this individual was male and therefore this individual was classified as a 'possible male'.

5.4.6 Stature and morphometric analysis

Stature was estimated for skeleton (2006/2008) from the right femur as approximately 1.67m. This estimate is slightly shorter than the average for males from the Roman period, recorded as 1.69m with a total range of 1.59m and 1.78m (Roberts and Cox 2003, 103).

No stature could be estimated for the female skeleton due to a lack of long complete long bones.

5.4.7 Skeletal pathology

In summary, severe osteoarthritis was observed in the hand bones of the skeleton from grave [2004] and in the left hip of skeleton (2006/2008). Osteoarthritic and degenerative joint changes were also seen in the spine of both individuals. The male individual (2006/2008) was noted to exhibit extensive, rugous muscular attachments about the arms and occipital bone of the cranium and an exostosis was present on the left humerus.

5.4.8 Dental pathology

Overall, generally minor but occasionally moderate calculus deposits were observed in skeleton (2006/2008) with some periodontal disease present. Some mandibular ante-mortem loss of dentition and a large cavity was also noted. No dental abscesses were observed. No dentition was present in the skeleton from grave [2004] due to post-mortem disturbance.

6 Synthesis

The archaeological remains discovered during the watching brief work demonstrate that activity of Roman date was occurring on this site and that inhumation burials, likely to be contemporary with this activity, took place here. This is not unexpected given the location and extent of occupation in the wider environs, particularly across the southern slopes of Bredon Hill. The full extent of Roman remains across the development may not have been fully established however, mainly as a result of the circumstances of the second phase of archaeological monitoring on the site; deeper groundworks could easily have removed discrete or ephemeral features before observation commenced.

It is considered that the linear features revealed were once part of a Roman field system, probably associated with a rural farmstead, although no indication of the specific location for Roman settlement close to the site was identified during the course of the work. However, the presence of numerous enclosures alongside a trackway feature identified by cropmark evidence (thought to be of prehistoric date), and the discovery of a Roman box flue tile, all to the south of the site, could indicate that this field system is on the northern periphery of an area of substantial multi-period occupation (Fig 7; WSM 05097, SAM 1005311, WSM 29229, WSM 29230, WSM 29233, and WSM

29606). Potentially, the trackway (WSM 29233) would have once linked this activity to that on Bredon Hill, although during both phases of the project no evidence of the trackway extending into the development area was revealed. This is likely because it passes by the site, but could perhaps be due to the heavy landscaping that had occurred on the site previously; the first phase of work in particular demonstrated that this was extensive, and related to the original construction of the school.

The presence of burials is a good indicator that the trackway is, or was, nearby, as it is sometimes found that rural settlements followed the traditional Roman law prohibiting burial within the boundaries of towns and cities. Cemeteries and burials thus tended to occur along the roads and trackways leading into settlement areas (see Taylor 2001, 87-131). However, rural burial practice in the Roman period is not thoroughly understood, particularly the relationship between burial and associated settlement, though correlations between burial and boundary or linear features (such as ditches on the periphery of settlements) have been noted in some areas (Ossafreelance 2014). In this case, the finds from this site are consistent with agricultural activity with domestic occupation in the near vicinity in the late 1st and early 2nd centuries and it is considered that the inhumations are highly likely to pertain to this phase of activity. No diagnostic pottery post-dating 200 AD was recovered from the archaeological features, which were sealed by a subsoil layer containing material dating to the 3rd to 4th centuries. This suggests that burial here had ceased by the mid to late Roman period, although the limited stratigraphic and finds evidence from the site precludes a definitive statement as to the final date of burial activity. Certainly burial appears to have been on a small scale and could represent a short phase of use associated with a single settlement. Small groups of graves dating to the late Iron Age and Roman period, are often found alongside a farmstead or small settlement in Worcestershire, probably demonstrating a localised economy of family run farms (Ossafreelance 2014). The orientation of the graves also indicates that these individuals were not Christian.

The skeletal remains were assessed to be two adults. The first, removed during police investigation, was a female aged over 50 years at death. The remains of this individual were well preserved but heavily fragmented, limiting osteological analysis, although degenerative joint changes were observed in the spine in addition to a severe and chronic case of osteoarthritis present in the hands. The second individual, again fragmentary but fortunately more complete, was of a possible male aged over 25-30 years at death. His stature was approximately 1.67m and the remains were notably robust in the upper arms, with a bony exostosis present on the left humerus, indicative of muscular trauma. A severe case of osteoarthritis was present at the left hip and degenerative joint changes in the spine were noted, as well as minor scoliosis in the spine. The presence of hobnails, found around the left foot of the female inhumation, is a characteristic of rural Roman burial and is often associated with a physical lifestyle involving agriculture (Ossafreelance 2014). This correlates well with the osteological evidence and the nature of the site. Despite the truncation of the second grave (skeleton 2006/2008) it was possible to suggest that the skull may not have been in an anatomically correct position, indicative of a decapitation burial. This is not an uncommon find for Roman interments, particularly in rural contexts, and is potentially linked to a wish to release the spirit of the dead (Taylor 2001, 123). It is also not an uncommon find for Worcestershire; similar burial practices were observed at the edge of an enclosure site in St Johns, Worcester, for example (Wainwright 2010).

The environmental evidence was of very limited significance and did not add to the information revealed during the watching brief.

Overall, despite the limited nature of the archaeological work during this project, and the unfortunate circumstances under which the burials were disturbed, some important information regarding Roman activity and burial in and around Overbury has been revealed. This adds a small contribution to the archaeological evidence for burial practice on a wider scale across rural Worcestershire during the Roman period.

7 Publication summary

Worcestershire Archaeology has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, Worcestershire Archaeology intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication:

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Overbury First School, Overbury, Worcestershire (NGR SO 9583 3723; WSM 49657). It was commissioned by Speller Metcalfe Gloucester Ltd who is running the development works on site. This involves the demolition of some existing structures and the construction of new buildings with pedestrian access, including associated landscaping.

The development site was considered to include potential heritage assets associated with the medieval settlement of Overbury, in addition to being located close to a series of cropmarks representing a probable trackway with conjoined enclosures, thought to be of prehistoric origin (WSM 29223).

Two phases of work occurred on site; an initial stage of fieldwork was undertaken in August 2013 and involved the observation of an area of ground reduction. This was reported on by Worcestershire Archaeology in September 2013. Secondly, groundworks taking place on site in February 2014, at a greater depth than observed in August 2013, disturbed human remains in two places. The police were informed by the contractors and a forensics team investigated, before informing Worcestershire Archaeology. Archaeological investigations resumed on site and further ground reduction and the excavation of a trench for the installation of a retaining wall was monitored in March 2014.

The archaeological remains discovered are considered to be of Roman date and representative of small scale agricultural activity in the form of field systems, alongside associated inhumation burials. The trackway feature was not revealed and no settlement site was identified, but the presence of burials would suggest that occupation in close proximity. The two burials were adult individuals, probably a male and a female, both of whom exhibited signs of a physical lifestyle. Hobnails found in one of the graves are characteristic of rural Roman burial and are often associated with an agricultural role, which correlates with the other evidence. Despite the severe truncation and disturbance it was determined that one of the inhumations could have been a decapitation burial. Full osteological analysis was undertaken.

8 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project: Penelope Bossom (Overbury Estate); Alan Keeble, David Burchett, David Price and Paul Fletcher (Speller Metcalfe Gloucester Ltd); Richard Newman (Bryant Priest Newman Limited); Mike Glyde (Historic Environment Planning Officer, Worcestershire County Council).

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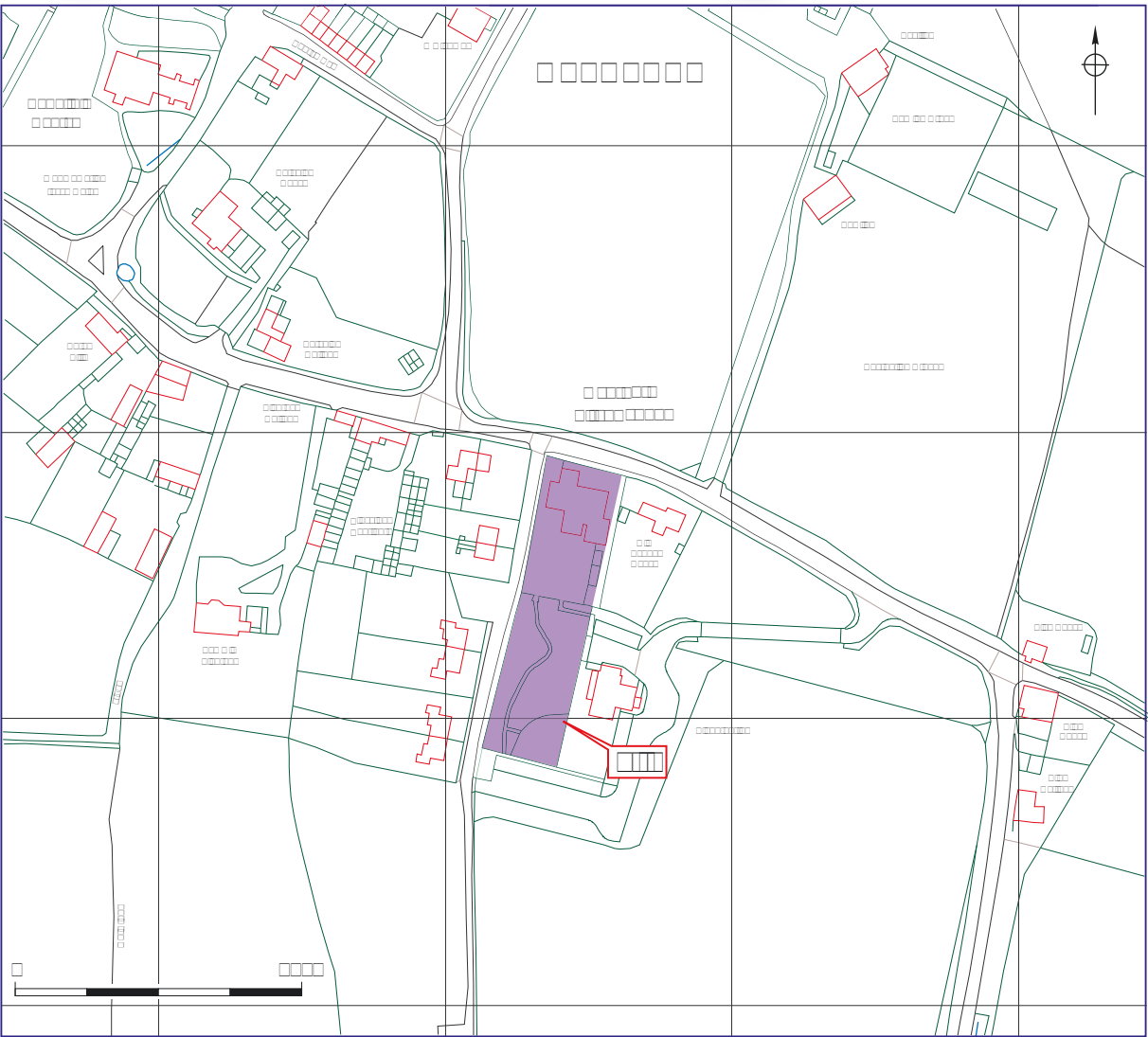
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Figures



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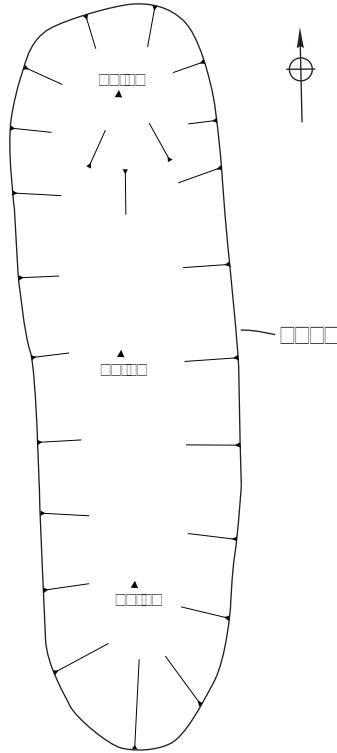
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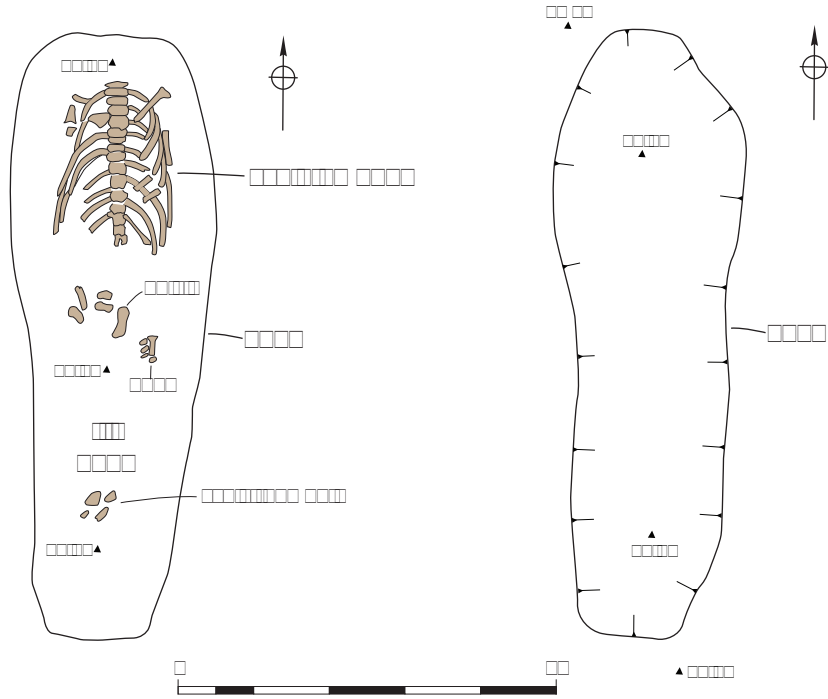
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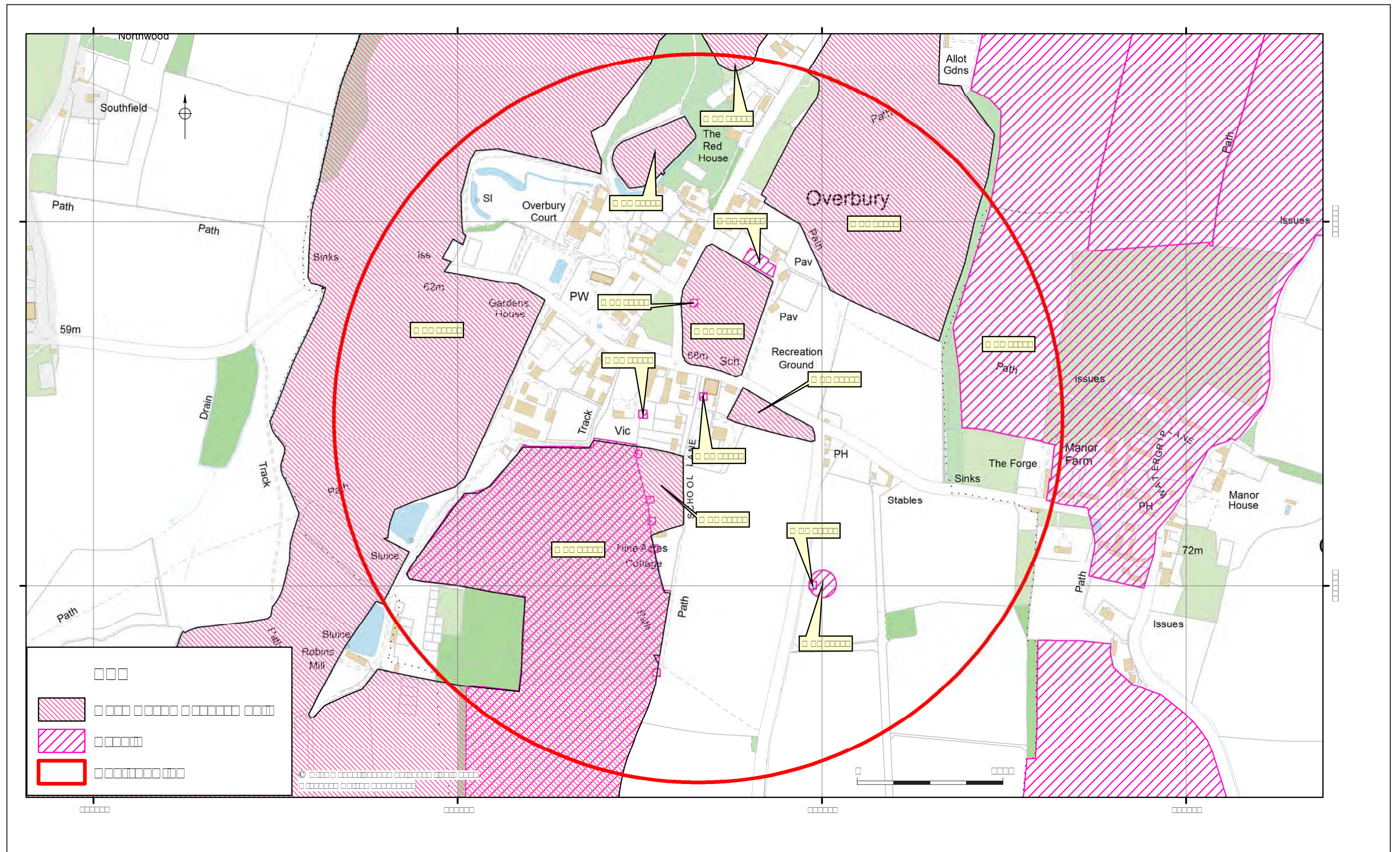


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Worcestershire HER Events in the vicinity of the site

Figure 8

Plates



Plate 1: View of the development site during the first stage of work, facing north-west



Plate 2: View of the development during the second stage of work, facing north-east



Plate 3: The police forensic scene before removal of the first inhumation, grave [2004], facing south



Plate 4: Grave [2004] fully excavated after archaeological intervention, facing north



Plate 5: Hobnails recovered from grave [2004]



Plate 6: Grave [2007] containing inhumation (2006), facing north

Appendix 1 Context descriptions

Area 1

Maximum dimensions: Length: 50m Width: 25m Depth: 0.50m

Main deposit description

Context number	Feature type	Context type	Description	Depth
100	Modern Layer	Layer	Tarmac surface	0.10m
101	Modern Layer	Layer	Hardcore levelling	0.15m
102	Made Ground	Layer	Compact redeposited limestone brash	0.10m
103	Made Ground	Layer	Moderately compact dark grey clay - made ground	0.15m
104	Natural	Layer	Natural limestone brash	0.50m+
105	Modern feature	Structure	Modern brick and concrete footing for flagpole	0.50m
106	Modern feature	Cut	Square cut for modern flagpole base (105)	0.50m
107	Topsoil	Layer	Friable dark brown loamy silt - modern topsoil east of playground	0.25m
108	Drain	Cut	Modern drain filled with topsoil and concrete and pipe	0.50m+

Area 2

Maximum dimensions: Length: 40m Width: 20m Depth: 0.94m

Main deposit description

Context number	Feature type	Context type	Description	Depth
2000	Topsoil	Layer	Firm mid greyish brown silty clay topsoil layer covering site	0.20m
2001	Subsoil	Layer	Friable dark greyish brown clay silt subsoil layer	0.12m
2002	Natural	Layer	Moderately Compact light yellowish brown sandy clay natural limestone brash	0.20m+
2003	Grave	Fill	Firm mid yellowish brown silty clay fill of grave removed during police investigation	0.12m
2004	Grave	Cut	Grave cut, N-S orientated burial truncated by machining	0.12m
2005	Grave	Fill	Firm mid yellowish grey sandy clay grave backfill of [2007]	0.10m
2006	Grave	Skeleton	Heavily truncated burial, appears supine and extended	-
2007	Grave	Cut	Grave cut, N-S burial	0.10m
2008	Disarticulated	Skeleton	Disarticulated assemblage of human remains removed by machine, likely from skeleton 2006	-
2009	Pit	Fill	Friable light pinkish brown silty clay fill of truncated pit [2010]	0.06m
2010	Pit	Cut	Shallow pit feature	0.06m
2011	Ditch	Fill	Firm mid yellowish brown sandy clay fill of ditch [2012]	0.94m
2012	Ditch	Cut	Linear ditch, possible boundary feature	0.94m
2013	Post hole	Fill	Soft mid brownish grey sandy clay	0.12m
2014	Post hole	Cut	Modern post hole feature	0.12m
2015	Layer	Layer	Friable orangey brown clayey sand	-
2016	Linear	Fill	Moderately Compact light greyish brown silty sand fill of linear [2017]	0.14m
2017	Linear	Cut	Small, shallow linear with possible terminus	0.14m

Appendix 2 Technical information

The archive (site code: WSM 49657)

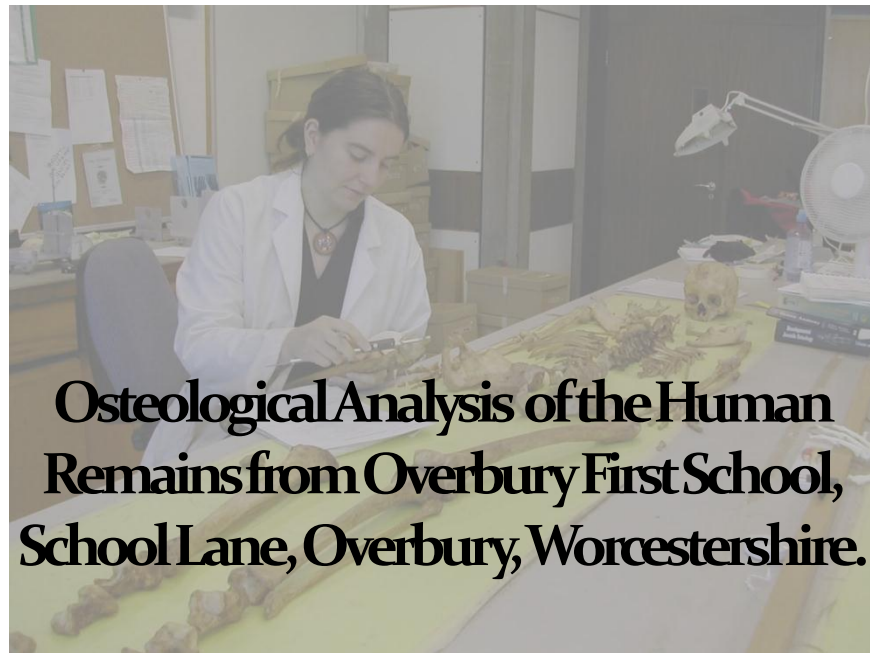
The archive consists of:

17	Context records AS1
7	Field progress reports AS2
3	Photographic records AS3
181	Digital photographs
1	Drawing number catalogues AS4
13	Scale drawings
1	Context number catalogues AS5
3	Skeleton records AS6
5	Sample records AS17
1	Sample number catalogues AS18
4	Flot records AS21
1	Trench record sheets AS41
1	Box of finds
1	CD-Rom/DVDs
1	Copy of this report (bound hard copy)

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Worcestershire County Museum
Museums Worcestershire
Hartlebury Castle
Hartlebury
Near Kidderminster
Worcestershire DY11 7XZ
Tel Hartlebury (01299) 250416

Appendix 3 Osteological Analysis



A Report for Worcestershire Archaeology

May 2014

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1. Introduction

The aim of this report is to present the data obtained from the osteological analysis of human skeletal remains recovered during an excavation at the site of Overbury Church of England First School, School Lane, Overbury, Worcestershire (NGR: SO 9583 3723, site code WSM 49657). A watching brief was carried out by Worcestershire Archaeology between the 13th and 20th August 2013 at the site on behalf of Speller Metcalfe Gloucester Ltd. prior to development (See Arnold 2013) followed by a later watching brief in February 2014.

During the course of site development work in February 2014, human remains were discovered in a shallow grave by construction staff [2004]. The remains were investigated by West Mercia Police and were identified as over 100 years old (See West Mercia Scientific Support Unit scene examination report 22/C/14/000001292). Subsequently a second grave containing human remains (SK2006) was discovered. Again, these remains were disturbed by mechanical digger on account of the grave being very shallow. Following consultation with West Mercia Police a strip and search was undertaken by Worcestershire Archaeology, expanding upon the original area surveyed as a watching brief. The graves were recorded and as bone preservation was good this allowed the retrieval of remains disturbed previously (recorded as ([2008])).

Both burials were aligned on a north-south axis and were not directly associated with any features on site. The first grave cut [2004], containing the remains SK[2003] was located approximately 6m east of the second grave cut [2007], containing the remains SK[2006/2008]. SK[2003] was accompanied by hobnails around the foot area of the grave. No other finds were associated with the skeletal remains. The remains of SK[2003] were supine in an extended position with the forearms placed across the torso. The remains of SK[2006/2008] were also supine and in an extended position, though fragments of skull recovered *in situ* from were located in the leg area of the grave. The torso was situated in close proximity to the grave cut at the head end, leaving little room for the head. It is likely then that this individual had undergone decapitation. Both of the graves were thought to date to the Roman period from the presence of hobnails, though no other finds were directly associated with the skeletal remains.

Osteoarchaeological analysis was undertaken to assess the condition and completeness of the human skeletal remains recovered from the excavated graves as well as to determine the age,

sex and stature of the individuals present. Any non-metric traits, skeletal and dental pathologies were also recorded. An overview of the overall findings for the group is presented here in addition to a summary catalogue of the human remains per context. Due to the small sample size and preservation of some of the skeletal remains, prevalence rates of pathologies within the group were not calculated; any skeletal or dental pathologies are recorded according to individual.

2. Methods and Process

The skeletal material was analysed according to the standards laid out in the guidelines recommended by the British Association of Biological Anthropologists and Osteologists in conjunction with the IFA (Guidelines to the Standards for Recording Human Remains, Brickley and McKinley (eds) 2004) as well as by English Heritage (Human Bones from Archaeological Sites: Guidelines for producing assessment documents and analytical reports, Centre for Archaeology Guidelines, 2002).

Recording of the material was carried out using the recognised descriptions contained in Standards for Data Collection from Human Skeletal Remains by Buikstra and Ubelaker (1994). Full recording forms are supplied separately to be archived with any other archaeological recording forms. All skeletal data has been recorded using an MS-Access database(s) which can be found on the CD-Rom provided.

The material was analysed macroscopically and where necessary with the aid of a magnifying glass for identification purposes. Where relevant, digital photographs have been used for illustration and a full digital image archive of all pathologies and any other features of interest has been provided on the CD-Rom enclosed with this report.

The material was analysed without prior knowledge of associated artefacts so that the assessment remained as objective as possible.

Comparison of the results was made with published osteological data from contemporary skeletal populations.

2.1 Reasons for the Analysis

Osteological analysis was carried out to ascertain:

- ❑ Inventory of the skeletal material
- ❑ Condition of bone present
- ❑ Completeness of the skeleton
- ❑ Age Assessment
- ❑ Sex Determination
- ❑ Non-metric Traits
- ❑ Stature and Morphometric Data
- ❑ Skeletal Pathology
- ❑ Dental Pathology

2.2 Skeletal Inventory

An inventory of the skeletal elements present is undertaken to assess the completeness of the skeletal remains and identify the number of individuals present. An inventory also provides information on the specific elements within the skeleton that are present and can be assessed for pathological changes. Each element is recorded as present or absent. The long bones are recorded according to the presence or absence of the proximal (upper), middle and distal (lower) sections as well as the proximal and distal joint surfaces. The completeness of the bones of the axial skeleton (with the exception of the spine) is recorded according to the categories of <25%, 25-50%, 50-75% and 75%>.

A summary inventory of the skeletal elements present for each individual is provided in the skeletal catalogue below (see Section 3). A full inventory can be found on the enclosed CD-Rom. No duplication of elements was observed within any one context and the inventory taken confirmed that each context contained the remains of a single individual. A number of bone fragments from context [2006] were reunited with fragments from context [2008], confirming that these two contexts contained the remains of the same individual.

2.3 Condition of the Bone Present

The condition of the bone was assessed macroscopically according to the categories and descriptions provided by the Guidelines to the Standards for Recording Human Remains (Brickley and McKinley, eds, 2004). Since most skeletons exhibit more than one grade of state of preservation, these categories are simplified into 4 main groups of preservation: Good (grades 0-2), Fair (grades 2-4), Poor (grades 4-5+) and Varied (more than 4 grades of condition). The condition of human bone can be influenced by both extrinsic (i.e. taphonomic conditions) and intrinsic (i.e. robustness) factors (Henderson 1987).

SK[2003] and SK[2006/2008] were both recorded as being in 'good' condition, being scored as grades 1 and 2. Some surface erosion was noted in both skeletons around the epiphyses of the long bones but generally surface preservation was good, allowing for metric analysis and observation for pathological changes.

2.4 Completeness of Skeletons

This is a guide to the overall completeness of the individual's skeletal remains and is calculated according to the percentage of the bones present in relation the total number of bones in a complete human skeleton. Completeness of remains is gauged through an assessment of the amount of material representing different areas of the body. A complete skeleton comprises of:

Skull = 20%

Torso = 40%

Arms = 20%

Legs = 20%

Each area of the skeleton was assessed and then placed into the following four categories of completeness: <25%, 25-50%, 50-75% and 75%> (Buikstra and Ubelaker 1994).

Recording the completeness of the individual can allow an insight to be gained into how much post-depositional activity has occurred as well as to assess how much information can potentially be gained from the remains.

SK[2003] was between 25-50% complete. The grave had been disturbed by an unobserved mechanical digger due to the shallowness of the grave and it is likely that some skeletal elements had been removed via this disturbance prior to *in situ* identification. No skull bones were present and the remains consisted primarily of fragmented long bones and torso elements from the lower half of the body. Some hand and foot elements had survived.

SK[2006/2008] was over 75% complete despite similar disturbance by a mechanical digger due to retrieval of the disturbed skeletal remains by the on-site archaeologist. There was a notable absence of small bones, however, particularly those of the hand and feet. The cranial bones were also under-represented as were the cervical vertebrae. Those cranial bones recovered were located at the foot end of the grave. The larger bones recovered, including those *in situ*, were generally fragmented, due in part to the shallowness of the grave and the location of the skeleton close to the modern ground horizon.

2.5 *Age Assessment*

Establishing the age and sex of individuals from an archaeological assemblage not only provides an insight into the demographic profile of the population but can also be used to inform us of patterns in pathological distributions in a skeletal assemblage.

The age of sub-adults is assessed using both dental development (Smith 1991) and eruption (Ubelaker 1989) as well as long bone lengths (Schaefer *et al.* 2009) and epiphyseal fusion (Scheuer & Black 2004). These methods can usually provide a reasonably accurate age estimation due to a relatively narrow range of variation in normal sub-adult development.

Thus, sub-adults can be placed into the following age categories: Foetal (<36 weeks), Neonate (0-1 month), Young Infant (1-6 months), Older Infant (6-12 months), Child (1-5 years), Juvenile (6-12 years) and Adolescent (13-17 years).

Assessment of adult age at death, unfortunately, results in much less specific age estimates due to a much greater individual variation in the features exhibited by the examined elements at particular ages (Cox 2000). Age estimation of adults was assessed from analysis of the auricular surface (Lovejoy et al 1985) and the pubic symphysis (Brookes and Suchey, 1990). Each of these methods examines the deterioration of these surfaces and categorises them accordingly. This deterioration is due in part to the health status of the individual but can also be influenced by life-style and so the variation produced by these factors results in much wider age categories: Very Young Adult (18-24), Young Adult (25-34), Middle Adult (35-49) and Old Adult (50+) (Buikstra and Ubelaker, 1984). Grading of dental attrition was also used as a supplementary age assessment technique using the Miles method (1963) where dentition sets were complete enough to allow fair observation.

SK[2003] was an adult individual, estimated to have been aged over 50 years at death based on observations of the auricular surface. All the observable epiphyses were fused. Dental attrition was unobservable. Overall, this individual was classified as an old adult.

SK[2006/2008] was also an adult individual but unfortunately no specific age estimation could be undertaken due to the lack of observable elements. All the observable epiphyses were fused, including the medial end of the clavicle, suggesting that this individual was over 25-30 years old. Overall, the skeletal remains were classified as those of an adult.

2.6 Sex Determination

Sex is assessed using the criteria laid out by Buikstra and Ubelaker (1984) in the analysis of morphological features of the skull and pelvis. In addition, metric data is also used where possible, taking measurements of sexually dimorphic elements such as the femoral and humeral head (Bass 1995). Categories ascribed to individuals on the basis of this data were 'Male', 'Possible Male', 'Indeterminate', 'Possible Female', 'Female' and 'Unobservable'. Sex may be ascribed on the basis of metrics alone where no sexually dimorphic traits are

observable. Where sex was not observable by either metric or morphological observations, it was recorded as 'Unobservable'. No sexing of sub-adult material is attempted due to the lack of reliable criteria available.

Based upon morphological assessment, SK[2003] was classified as a 'possible female'. No skull was present but the observable sexually dimorphic features of the pelvis were female. However, the metric analysis of the femoral head resulted in the sex ascribed being indeterminate and the circumference of the tibia at the nutrient foramen was indicative of possible male sex. Although only a few morphological traits about the pelvis were observable, these were observed as definite female and are more reliable indicators than the metric analysis.

SK[2006/2008] was similarly depleted of morphological indicators of sex. No features were observable in the pelvis and only three features were observable about the skull, two of which were indeterminate. However, metric analysis consistently indicated that the sex of this individual was male and therefore this individual was classified as a 'possible male'.

2.7 *Non-Metric Traits*

Non-metric traits are morphological features that occur both in bone and dentition. These features have no specific functional purpose and occur in some individuals and not in others. The origins of non-metric traits have now been shown to be highly complex, each having its own aetiology and each being influenced to differing extents by genetics, the environment and by physical activity. A review of the current literature suggests that the undetermined specific origins of these traits, in addition to the fact that there is more genetic variation within populations than between them, can prevent useful conclusions regarding their presence or absence in skeletal remains from being drawn (Tyrell 2000).

The presence of any non-metric traits is noted in the skeletal catalogue below (see Section 3).

2.8 *Stature and Morphometric Analysis*

Stature of adult individuals can be reconstructed from measurements of long bones of the skeleton. Since the long bones of sub-adults have not yet fully developed it is not possible to provide an estimate of stature for immature remains. Stature is the result of many factors

including genetics and environmental influences (Floud *et al.* 1990), such as malnutrition and poor health. Height can be used as an indicator of health status and there is a wide range of literature on the relationships between height, health and social status. Estimated stature was calculated by taking the measurements of the individual long bones and using the formula provided by Trotter (1970). Variation in estimated stature can be up to 3cm.

Stature was estimated for SK[2006/2008] from the right femur as approximately 1.67m. This estimate is slightly shorter than the average for males from the Roman period, recorded as 1.69m with a total range of 1.59m and 1.78m (Roberts and Cox 2003, p. 103).

No stature could be estimated for the female skeleton [2003] due to a lack of long complete long bones.

Metric analysis of the long bones, cranium and mandible may also be undertaken on adult remains to provide comparative information on morphological variability. A summary of the morphometric data is provided in the skeletal catalogue. Full recording can be found on the CD-Rom provided.

2.9 *Skeletal Pathology*

Palaeopathology is the study of diseases of past peoples and can be used to infer the health status of groups of individuals within a population as well as indicate the overall success of the adaptation of a population to its surrounding environment. Pathologies are categorised according to their aetiologies; e.g. congenital, metabolic, infectious, traumatic, neoplastic etc. (Roberts and Manchester 1997). Any pathological modifications to the bone are described. The size and location of any lesion is also noted. Distribution of lesions about the skeleton should be noted to allow diagnosis. A differential diagnosis for any pathological lesions should also be provided.

Details of pathological conditions observed in Overbury assemblage are noted in the skeletal catalogue below (see Section 3). In summary, severe osteoarthritis was observed in the hand bones of SK[2003] and in the left hip of SK[2006/2008]. Osteoarthritic and degenerative joint changes were also seen in the spine of both individuals. The male individual SK[2006/2008] was

noted to exhibit extensive, rugous muscular attachments about the arms and occipital bone of the cranium and an exostosis was present on the left humerus.

2.10 Dental Pathology

Dental diseases include conditions that not only directly affect the teeth but also the soft tissue surrounding them, sometimes observable in changes to the underlying alveolar bone (Hillson 1986). Each condition can give an indication of different aspects of lifestyle and health of the individual. For example, caries is associated with diets high in sucrose content. The presence of calculus can inform us about dental hygiene whilst enamel hypoplastic defects testify to developmental stresses that an individual has undergone in childhood (Goodman and Armelagos 1985, Hutchinson and Larsen 1988, Dobney and Goodman 1991). The analysis of dental disease, therefore, not only informs us of specific oral conditions but provides complimentary data regarding overall health status and cultural practices.

A summary of dental pathology is provided in Section 3 below. Overall, generally minor but occasionally moderate calculus deposits were observed in SK[2006/2008] with some periodontal disease present. Some mandibular ante-mortem loss of dentition and a large cary was also noted. No dental abscesses were observed. No dentition was present in SK[2003] due to post-mortem disturbance.

3. Catalogue of Human Remains

The results of the osteoarchaeological analysis are presented below in numerical order according to each individual context. Due to the small sample size, disease prevalence rates have not been calculated but prevalence rates reported in the literature for other, contemporary sites is referred to. A full inventory and recording of the human skeletal remains can be found on the MS Access database.

SK2003 (Grave cut [2004])

Inventory: No cranium or mandible; T9-L5 vertebrae; 3 left ribs; 8 right ribs; Distal fragmented humerii, fragmented right radius, fragmented right and left ulnae; Complete but fragmented femora, fragmented tibiae and fibulae; Partial right ilium; Fairly complete right ischium, incomplete left ischium, no pubic bones; Small fragment of sacrum; No scapulae; No clavicles; No patellae; No coccyx; No carpals; 1st right, 1st left metacarpal and 1 unidentified distal half

metacarpal; 11 hand phalanges; Right and left calcanei and left talus; one left 5th metatarsal; 0 foot phalanges.

Completeness: 25-50%>

Condition: Good (Grades 1 and 2)

Dental Inventory and Pathology:

2003	Observable Dentition	Observable Tooth Sockets	Ante-mortem Loss	Caries	Calculus	Periodontal Disease	Enamel Hypoplasia	Abscess
n	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Age Assessment: Old Adult: 50+ years. Auricular surface stage: Left 8 (60+ years).

Sex Determination: Possible Female. Pelvic morphology, female; metric data, indeterminate.

Stature: Unobservable

Platymeric Index: 78.1 (Platymeric)

Platycnemic Index: 83.8 (Eurycnemic)

Non-Metric Traits: None

Skeletal Pathology: Severe Osteoarthritis. Eburnation, macroporosity and/or large osteophytes were observed on the proximal and distal interphalangeal joint surfaces (See Plate 1). Unfortunately, it is not possible to identify whether the phalangeal bones belong to one hand or to both. The changes are consistent in all the observable phalanges present, however, and represent a systemic condition that was likely to be present in both hands. Deep volar grooves were present on several of the phalanges with co-occurring marked osseous attachments for the *flexor digitorum superficialis* muscle. This indicates that the fingers were permanently in a flexed position as a result of this long standing, chronic condition. Some of the osteophytic development, particularly of the distal phalanges, appears to have resulted in the 'gull wing' sign noted radiologically to be indicative of erosive osteoarthritis (Rogers and Waldron 1995; <http://radiopaedia.org/articles/gull-wing-appearance>) (See Plate 2). Degenerative joint changes were also noted in the zygapophyseal joint and lower vertebrae bodies, particularly in L4, L5 and S1. The changes, consisting of subchondral erosion and necrosis with lytic lesions, were reminiscent of those noted in tuberculous discitis (Rogers and Waldron 1995, p. 92) but could also have been caused by age-related bone remodelling resulting from osteopenia (bone loss) (Ortner 2003).

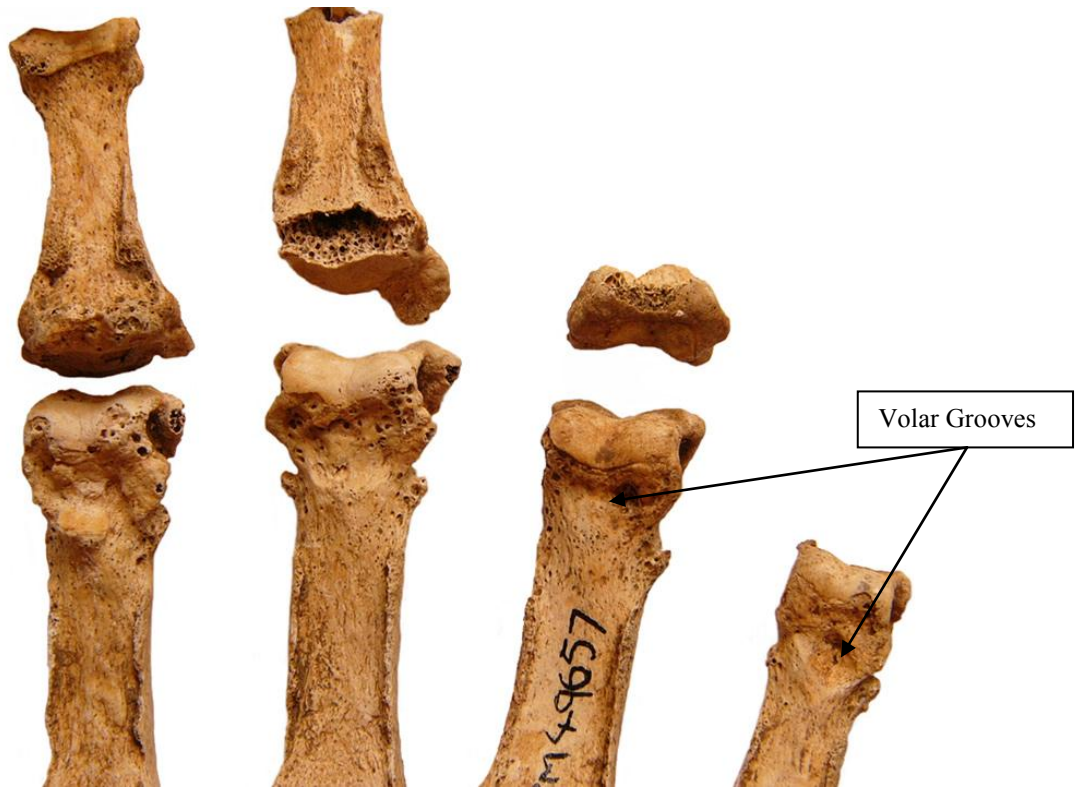


Plate 1: *Osteoarthritis of the Interphalangeal Joints (SK 2003)*



Plate 2: *'Gull wing' sign (illustrated in blue) at a distal Interphalangeal Joint (SK 2003)*

SK2006/2008 (Grave Cut [2007])

Inventory: A few cranial and mandibular fragments; C6-L5 vertebrae; 9 left ribs and 11 right ribs; Distal right humerus and complete but fragmented left humerus; Fairly complete but fragmented radii and ulnae; Fairly complete but fragmented femora and tibiae, partial fibulae; Partial left ilium and ischium, partial right ischium, no pubis bones; Partial scapulae; Partial right clavicle and complete but fragmented left clavicle; Partial left patellae; Fragment of sternum and sacrum, no coccyx; No carpals, 5 left metacarpals, 8 hand phalanges; No tarsals; no metatarsals and no foot phalanges.

Completeness: 75>%

Condition: Good (Grades 1 and 2).

Dental Inventory and Pathology:

2006/ 2008	<i>Observable Dentition</i>	<i>Observable Tooth Sockets</i>	<i>Ante-mortem Loss</i>	<i>Caries</i>	<i>Calculus</i>	<i>Periodontal Disease</i>	<i>Enamel Hypoplasia</i>	<i>Abscess</i>
<i>n</i>	4	11	3	1	4	3	0	0

Minor periodontal disease; minor –moderate calculus; 1 large cary.

Age Assessment: Adult. 25-30 years +. Medial end of the clavicle fused.

Sex Determination: Possible male. Cranial morphology, indeterminate; metric analysis, male.

Stature: 1.67m

Platymeric Index: 80.9 (Platymeric)

Platycnemic Index: 72.0 (Eurycnemic)

Non-Metric Traits: Supracondylar process, right humerus

Skeletal Pathology: Severe osteoarthritis, left hip. Massive osteophyte formation is present around the acetabular rim forming a complete bone collar of approximately 3cm in depth at the inferior aspect, completely obliterating the acetabular notch (See Plate 3). Irregular enthesophytic bone formation is present on the superior aspect of the acetabular rim, where the joint surface is affected by gross macroporosity and eburnation. The superior aspect of the left femoral head also exhibits these changes whereas large, irregular but smooth lamellar bone deposits are present on the inferior surface. These deposits are approximately 3mm in thickness. A large quantity of striated lamellar bone of substantial thickness is also present along the entire femoral neck on the anterior side with large amounts of speculated bone present along the line of the capsular attachment. The femoral head and neck fragment is notable heavy and dense. Further osteoarthritic and degenerative joint changes were noted in

the spine, in particular involving the zygapophyseal joints in the mid thoracic and lumbar regions. Asymmetry was noted of the neural arch of the 2nd and 3rd lumbar vertebrae, which is likely to have resulted in a minor scoliosis of the spine, placing extra pressure on the joints of the spine and predisposing them to joint disease.

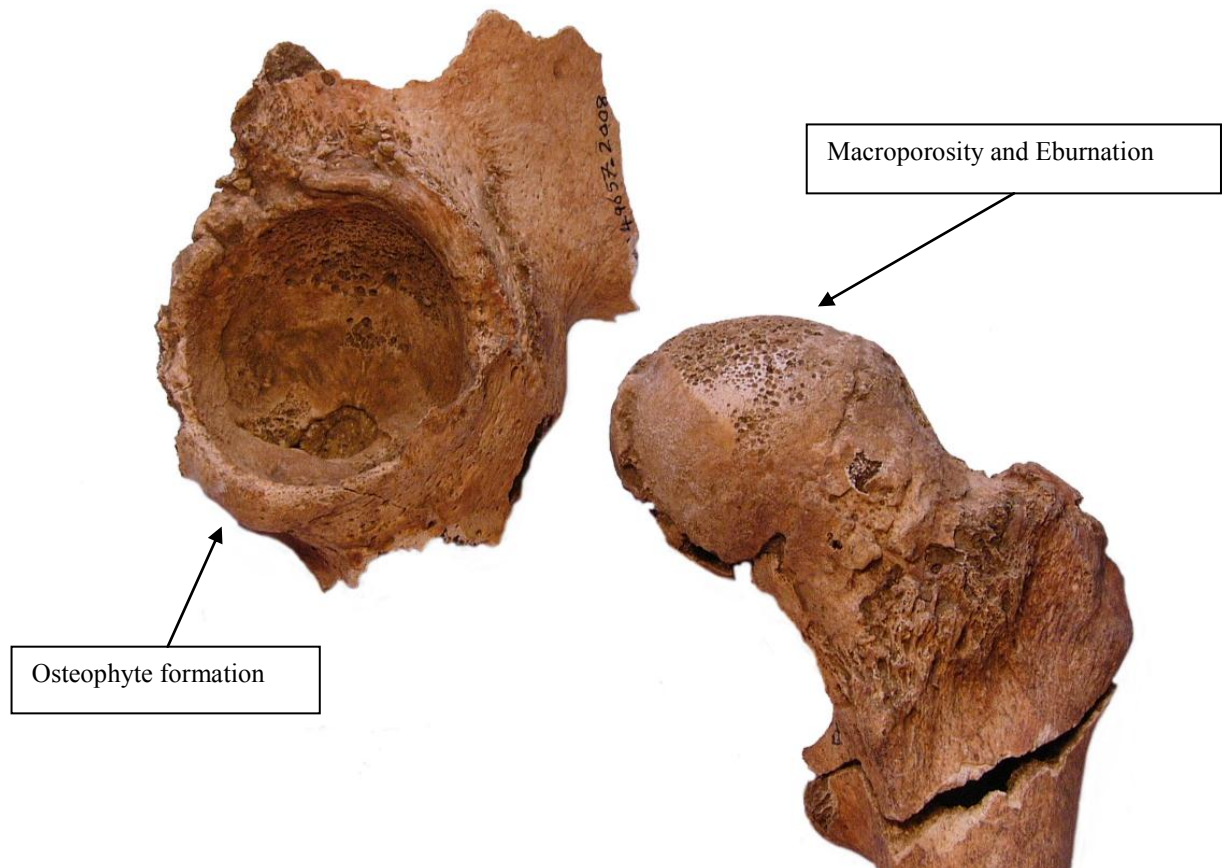


Plate 3: *Osteoarthritis of the left Hip (SK 2006/2008)*

Also noted was a fairly large exostosis measuring 12.4mm superior-inferior x 7mm anterior-posterior located at the inferior aspect of the deltoid attachment site on the left humerus (See Plate 4). This may represent an event of muscular trauma to the arm. A porotic lamellar bone deposit was also noted about a well defined small lytic lesion c. 5mm in diameter at the site of the external occipital protuberance. The muscular attachments at the nuchal crest were also robust and this bone deposit may also represent localised muscular trauma.

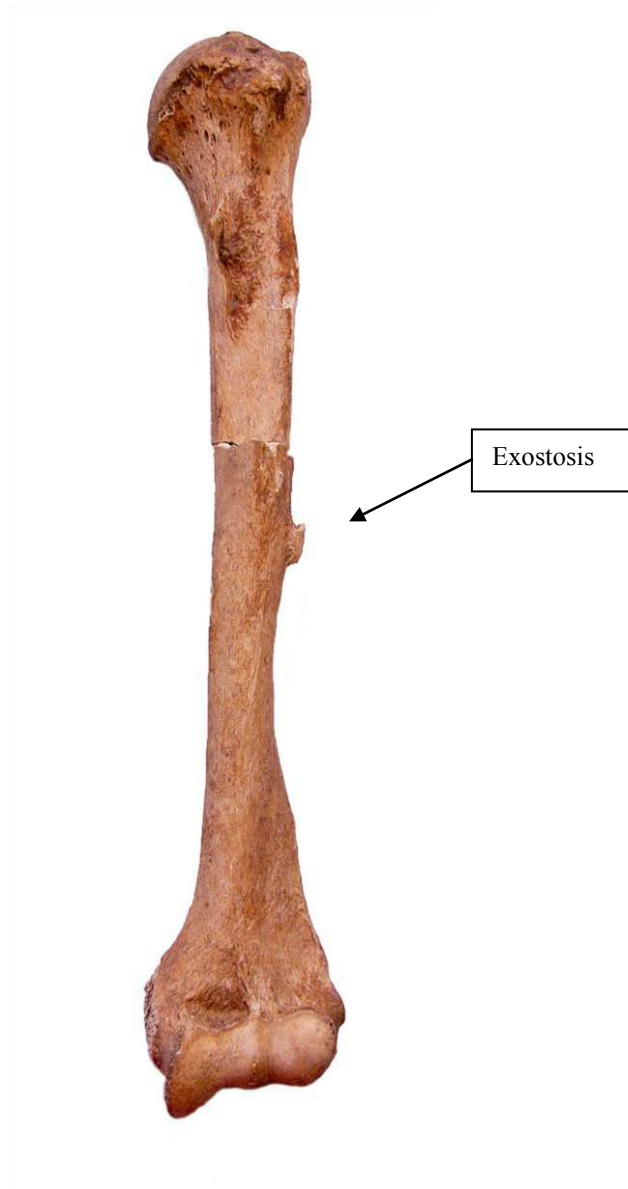


Plate 4: *Exostosis representing muscular trauma (SK 2006/2008)*

4. Conclusion

Excavation at the site of the Overbury First School, School Lane, Overbury in Worcestershire revealed the remains of two inhumated, articulated individuals dating to the Roman period.

The first individual, SK[2003] was an adult possible female, aged over 50 years at death. The remains of this individual were well preserved but heavily fragmented and only 25-50% complete. Osteological analysis was, therefore, limited. Nonetheless, degenerative joint changes were observed in the spine in addition to a severe and chronic case of osteoarthritis present in the hands. Unfortunately, it was not possible to estimate stature due to a lack of

complete long bones and no dentition was present so no evaluation of dental health could be undertaken.

The second individual, SK[2006/2008], was an adult possible male, aged over 25-30 years at death, of approximately 1.67m in stature. The remains of this individual were well preserved and over 75% complete, allowing for a full examination for pathological changes. This individual had a severe case of osteoarthritis present at the left hip and degenerative joint changes in the spine. The skeletal remains were notable robust in the upper arms and a bony exostosis was present on the left humerus, indicative of muscular trauma. Minor scoliosis was probably present in the spine indicated by the asymmetry present in the neural arches of the lumbar vertebrae. Calculus was present on the small number of observable dentition, with moderate deposits on the lingual surfaces, and was associated with mild periodontal disease. One large cavity was also present and three molar teeth had been lost ante-mortem.

The burials excavated, including finds of hobnails with the old adult female SK[2003] and likely decapitation of the adult male SK[2006/2008], are typical of Roman interments in the area and similar to the burials recently excavated from a number of sites near Wyre Piddle, Worcestershire (Western 2003, 2004) and St. Johns, Worcester (Western 2009). Hobnails are particularly characteristic of rural Roman burials and may be associated with a physically demanding agricultural lifestyle (Simmonds *et al.* 2008). The skeletal remains of the possible male SK[2006/2008], was notably robust and exhibited evidence of muscular trauma. Recent research suggests that females also played an important role in Roman agriculture on the Continent; female labourers were likely to have been employed in work on farmsteads, possibly involving the preparation of food, pastoralism and the manufacture of wool, cloth and textiles, the latter a lucrative trade (Roth 2009: 25-6). Roth (2003) argues thereby that females contributed considerably to the economic productivity of rural farmsteads and villa estates. The organisation of labour on farmsteads in Britain is not discussed but it is credible that females carried out equivalent labour and management roles on rural Roman settlements in England, perhaps reflected by the osteological and funerary evidence from sites such as Overbury across Worcestershire.

Roman rural burials in Britain and their relationship to associated settlements may not be well understood due to a lack of evidence compared to urban sites. In East Hampshire, for example, the orientation of graves was highly varied and it has been suggested that this was due to

alignment with features in the immediate local vicinity (Pearce 1999: 100), evidence for which may not survive. Radiocarbon dating of seemingly isolated or dispersed burials in Hertfordshire has returned dates of early, late and sub-Roman as well as middle Saxon periods (Pearce 1999:116). A comprehensive overview of provincial funerary evidence, consisting of rural burials grounds in Hampshire and Hertfordshire were found to contain only a few individual graves and the majority of burials were associated with boundary features, commonly ditches and gullies defining enclosures on settlement peripheries, most often in or close to site entrances (Pearce 1999: 100-1). Often, though not exclusively, deposits of infant skeletal remains were recovered from within settlements whereas adults tended to be located outside settlement boundaries (Pearce 1999: 102). Pearce infers from the form and location of rural burials in the provinces that they were no less formal than urban burials (Pearce 1999: 113) and that burials 'could form an integral part of boundary formation' (Pearce 1999:115). Platt (2012) also argues that the Roman tombs and sarcophagi are inherently liminal objects and materialise the intersection between life and death, an inference that may naturally be extended to the status of graves.

However, given the small numbers of interments recorded, often these rural burial grounds seemed to be short lived and there was little evidence of inter-generational continuity of burial or for it playing a role in demarcating the landscape. This is in accord with the literary evidence suggests that graves were designated as a *locus religiosus*, protecting them from destruction in order to permit access to ancestral graves on land that may not have belonged to living descendants (Robinson 1975, after Pearce 1999: 120; Platt 2012: 216-7). It appears that land in this context belonged to individuals as an economic asset rather than primarily representing ancestral ties or a sense of belonging, even though the right to visit graves, commemorate ancestors and to honour the *genii loci* (resident spirit) of people and places was clearly important. Though it is not clear to what extent Roman law applied to occupation in Britain in the early period, burials may in this context relate to and reflect land ownership or tenancy in dispersed rural settlement. Scheidel (2004: 24) also argues that migration within the Roman Empire would have resulted in high rates of relocation, putting emphasis on the nuclear family as a primary unit of social organisation and identity while ties to extended kin became diminished.

This pattern may also apply to Worcestershire, where small groups of individual graves dating to the late Iron age, Roman and Transition periods have been excavated from bounded

enclosures, usually near ditches or in banks, associated with nearby occupation in farmsteads and settlements i.e. Sainsbury's site, St. Johns, Worcester (See Western 2009); George Lane and Furzen Farm, as well as Upper Moor, Wyre Piddle, Worcestershire (Western 2004, 2003). These latter sites are located only a few miles away from Overbury. The pairs of burials excavated at George Lane and Upper Moor appear also to have consisted of a male and female adult individual (Western 2004, 2003) as was found at Overbury, though osteological analysis was limited at the former sites due to the poorer preservation of the skeletal remains present. This pattern of burial would appear to support the hypothesis that small farmsteads in Worcestershire were owned or run as part of an economic strategy by a nuclear family unit, simultaneously acting as a social and geographical unit to form the core basis for the selection of burial location in rural contexts. The recovery and analysis of these well preserved human skeletal remains from Overbury has, therefore, provided important information contributing towards the growing archaeological evidence for the nature of dispersed burial practices during the Roman period in rural Worcestershire.

5. Future Recommendations

- ❑ AMS dating of the human remains to establish a closer date of the interments

- ❑ Further research of similar sites would establish how this burial relates to other, contemporary burials in the region. This will aid an understanding of the use of the landscape during the Roman period and the nature of the relationship between settlement and funerary sites.

6. Acknowledgements

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THE ARCHIVE

Type	No	Type	No
Skeleton Recording Form A	2	Skeleton Recording Form L	0
Skeleton Recording Form B	2	Skeleton Recording Form P	0
Skeleton Recording Form D	2	Skeleton Recording Form Q	0
Skeleton Recording Form E	2	Skeleton Recording Form R	0
Skeleton Recording Form F	0	Skeleton Recording Form S	0
Skeleton Recording Form G	0	Skeleton Recording Form V	0
Skeleton Recording Form H	2	Skeleton Recording Form W	2
Skeleton Recording Form I	2	Articulated Inhumated Db	1
Skeleton Recording Form J	2		
Skeleton Recording Form K	2		

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Summary of data for Worcestershire HER

WSM 49657 (event HER number)

Artefacts

period	material class	material subtype	object specific type	count	weight(g)	start date	end date
early Roman	ceramic		pot	1	16	43	150
late med/early post-med	ceramic		tile	1	14	1200	1800
LIA/ERB	ceramic		pot	4	28	-100	200
post-medieval	ceramic		brick/tile	1	4	1600	1950
Roman	ceramic		plate(oven)	1	52	200	400
Roman	ceramic		pot	2	2	43	400
Roman	ceramic		pot	1	1	43	400
Roman	ceramic		pot	2	30	43	400
Roman	ceramic		pot	1	4	43	400
Roman	ceramic		pot	1	12	43	200
Roman	ceramic		pot	3	22	120	150
Roman	metal	iron	nail	18	6	43	400
undated	metal	iron	nail	1	4		

Environmental

Methods of retrieval	Yes/No
Hand retrieval	Yes
Bulk sample	Yes
Spot sample	
Auger	
Monolith	
Observed	

Type	Preservation	Date (note 1)	Specialist report? Y/N (note 2)	Key assemblage? Y/N (note 3)
Bone - human	Not decayed	Roman	Y	N
Bone – small mammal	Not decayed	Roman	N	N
Plant remains – macrofossils	Not decayed?	Modern?	Y	N
Plant remains – macrofossils	Charred	Roman	Y	N
Shell – mollusc	Not decayed	Modern	Y	N