ARCHAELOLGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT 1A HIGH STREET, DROITWICH, WORCESTERSHIRE

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Illustrated by Carolyn Hunt

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Archaeological watching brief at 1A, High Street, Droitwich, Worcestershire

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Background information

Client	Phillip Aldridge
Site address	1A High Street, Driotwich, Worcestershire
National Grid Reference	SO 8994 6341
Planning authority	Worcestershire County Council
Brief	HEAS 2004a
Project design	HEAS 2004b
Project parameters	IFA 1999

Previous archaeological work on the site

There has been no previous archaeological work undertaken on site.

Previous archaeological work on associated sites

Droitwich has been the subject of a recent survey undertaken as part of the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey. The research report contains a summary of previous archaeological work in the town and its immediate surroundings (Buteux and Hurst 1996).

The urban area of Droitwich is primarily a large area of 20th century industrial and residential development around what remains of the historic core (Buteux and Hurst 1996). The soils of Droitwich are unmapped, but the surrounding natural geology consists of peloalluvial gley soils along the river (Mackney *et al* 1983), surrounded by stagnogleys argillic brown earths overlying Keuper Marl and third river terrace deposits (Beard *et al* 1986).

The site lies at the northern end of the High Street at the junction with Ricketts Lane. This area has been the subject of considerable change and development over the recent centuries, including subsidence caused by 19th and 20th century brine extraction (Buteux and Hurst 1996). Information contained within the SMR suggests the potential for extensive deposits here of an Iron Age, Roman and medieval date. These include chance finds of flints dating to the mesolithic and neolithic periods throughout the Droitwich area (WSM 00605, 00678, 04154, 04575 and 21413, Buteux and Hurst 1996), though a concentration of flintwork, possibly dating to the Mesolithic, was found *in situ* at Bays Meadow (WSM 03956). Again at Bays Meadow, the earliest evidence for salt production in the Droitwich area was found, dating to *c.*500-100BC (WSM 21413). Evidence of late Iron Age activity has been uncovered during much of the fieldwork undertaken within the town (WSM 00602, 00694, 04575, 06000, 21391, 21407, 21412; Buteux and Hurst 1996). Quantities of Roman material, principally coins and pottery were found during the construction of saltworks in 1846, the Droitwich Junction canal in 1852 and the town sewers in 1878. More recently considerable Roman and later artefacts have been found during various construction work in and around the town (Buteux and Hurst 1996). In 1847 a Roman villa was discovered during the building of the railway through Bays Meadow (WSM 21411 and 21413).

Aims

The aim of the archaeological watching brief was to observe areas of ground disturbance associated with the preparation of new foundation trenches. The observations would be carried out in order to record archaeological deposits and to determine their extent, state of preservation, date and type.

Methods

General specification for watching brief	CAS 1995
Sources consulted	SMR 1st Edition OS Map 1885
Dates of fieldwork	23rd, 26th, 30th, April, 5th May 2004
Area of deposits observed	*c* 15m². Indicated on Fig 2
Dimensions of excavated areas observed	Foundations length 25 m width 0.50-0.65m depth 2.0m

Access to or visibility of structure

Observation of the footing trenches was undertaken both during and after machine excavation. Excavation was undertaken using a 360-degree, 3 tonne, tracked mini-digger using 500mm and 600mm toothed buckets. The exposed surfaces were sufficiently clean to observe well differentiated archaeological deposits. Access to the trenches was possible only in a few areas where the sides of the trench had been sufficiently sloped back to provide a safe working environment. In the areas where access was unsafe the deposits were recorded visually from the present ground surface. Selected areas were cleaned to confirm the depth and nature of the deposits present, and finds removed for dating purposes.

Statement of confidence

In the areas of the trench that were safe to enter, access to, and visibility of, deposits allowed a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved. In the areas that were unsafe to enter the visible archaeology was only observed from the surface, and this will have had a detrimental effect on the quality of the recording and the recovery of any potential artefacts.

Artefactual evidence

Artefact recovery policy

All artefacts from the area of salvage recording were retrieved by hand and retained in accordance with the service manual (CAS 1995 as amended).

Method of analysis

All hand-retrieved finds were examined and a primary record was made on a Microsoft Access 2000 database. Artefacts were identified, quantified and dated and a *terminus post quem* produced for each stratified context. Pottery was examined under x20 magnification and recorded by fabric type and form according to the fabric reference series maintained by the service (Hurst and Rees 1992).

Artefactual analysis

The pottery assemblage retrieved from the excavated area consisted of 45 sherds of pottery weighing 522g, eleven fragments of roof tile, five pieces of brick and two clay pipe stems. The group came from 10 stratified contexts and could be dated from the Roman period onwards (see Table 1). The

level of preservation was generally fair with the majority of sherds displaying only moderate levels of abrasion. However, many sherds, particularly those of oxidised fabric, displayed bleaching as a result of the brine groundwater, which underlies the town.

All sherds have been grouped and quantified according to fabric type (see Table 2). A total of three diagnostic form sherds were present and could be dated accordingly, the remaining sherds were datable by fabric type to the general period or production span. All specific forms of medieval date are referenced to the type series within the report for Deansway, Worcester (Bryant 2001).

Discussion of the pottery

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

Iron Age – early Roman

All but one sherd of 39 briquetage sherds (fabric 2) was retrieved from a series of layers (contexts 131, 132, 134 and 136) which could be allocated a *terminus post quem* of Early/middle Iron Age/early Roman date on the basis of this material. The remaining sherd was from the fill of a possible linear feature (context 120). Although the precise function of briquetage is not clear, they are closely linked to the production and/or transportation of salt from the brine springs at Droitwich. Vessels were very coarse in appearance being hand built using the coil method. As a result, the majority of surviving sherds are undiagnostic fragments broken along the coil edge. This was indeed the case with the material from this site with only one diagnostic sherd, which was clearly from the base of a vessel and this had a strong indentation in the underside, a feature characteristic of this vessel type (Rees 1986, 49).

Roman

The single sherd of samian ware was undiagnostic and clearly residual within a context of late post-medieval-modern date (context 105). Although the sherd displayed very little evidence of abrasion, it was heavily discoloured and had probably been burnt, with the slip being of a dark greenish grey colour and the fabric reduced throughout.

The rotary quern stone was also residual within a context of 18th century date (context 119). It was in two adjoining pieces and identified as being of May Hill conglomerate, a stone type commonly used for querns in this area (D. Hurst pers comm.). The form of this object indicated it to have been the upper stone of the quern and wear patterns observed on the face were of particular interest with smoothing only present in thin bands around the extreme inside and outside edges. The unworn nature of the rest of this surface may indicate that it was only in use for a very short period of time.

Medieval

Material of medieval date consisted of four residual sherds of pottery all dating to between the 11th and 12th centuries (contexts 105 and 109). All were from cooking pot vessels and displayed evidence of blackening and/or sooting on the external surface as a result of this function.

The earliest datable sherd was of Cotswold unglazed ware (fabric 57.1; context 109) and identified as coming from the rim of a rounded jar with everted rim (Deansway type 57.1.1) of early 11th century date. Remaining sherds from this context were both from square-rimmed cooking pots of 11th-12th century date. The first was of Worcester-type sandy unglazed ware (fabric 55; Deansway type 55.1) and the other of Cotswolds unglazed ware (fabric 57; Deansway type 57.3).

The remaining sherd was undiagnostic but identified as from a cooking pot of sandy limestone tempered ware (fabric 58; context 105). The source of this ware is unknown and vessels of this fabric are usually only found in small amounts on sites in this region (Bryant 2001, 73).

Post-medieval and modern

Three contexts (103, 105 and 119) could be allocated a *terminus post quem* date of 18th century onwards from datable artefacts. The majority of this material consisted of ceramic building material in the form of 11 fragments of roofing tile and five of brick, with most notable fragment being from a heavily burnt pan tile
(context 119).

Other material consisted of a single sherd of black glazed red sandy ware (fabric 78; context 103) which could be dated to the 18th century and two burnt fragments of clay pipe stem (context 103) of similar date.

Significance

All material from this site was consistent with that generally found within assemblages from Droitwich (Hurst 1992). However, the presence of large pieces of well-preserved briquetage from well-stratified deposits, including a sizeable base sherd is of particular note.

Unfortunately, the cobbled surface interpreted as possibly being an early street or road surface was not directly associated with datable finds. However, its position within the depositional sequence suggested it could be of early medieval date.

Table 1: Quantification of the assemblage

Material	Total	Weight (g)
Late Iron Age/early Roman pottery	39	346
Roman pottery	1	14
Medieval pottery	4	142
Post-medieval pottery	1	20
Brick	5	1878
Clay pipe stem	2	5
Roof tile	11	1854

Table 2: Quantification of the pottery by fabric

Fabric number	Fabric name	Total sherds	Weight (g)
2	Organic briquetage	39	346
43	Samian ware	1	14
55	Worcester-type unglazed ware	1	62
57	Cotswolds unglazed ware	1	48
57.1	Cotswolds unglazed ware	1	11
58	Sandy limestone tempered ware	1	21
78	Post-medieval red sandy ware	1	20

Discussion

Following a thorough inspection of the groundworks made during the course of the project it is clear that a large area of the site had been disturbed by the deposition of post-medieval industrial waste, mainly from the production of salt and the heating of the brine baths in the Victorian period. Relatively well-preserved archaeological deposits beneath were sealed beneath this post-medieval material.

The main area that appears to contain preserved archaeological deposits was towards the northern end of the site where considerable post-medieval deposits (contexts 103, 104 and 105) overlay least two cobble surfaces (contexts 108 and 112), one over lying the other. The higher of the two possibly represents a repair of the first, or a latter phase of construction. These both appear to be running in an east to west alignment, from the northern end of the High Street down towards the river. These cobble surfaces are both made from sub-rounded, deliberately placed large pebbles, set within an alluvial matrix. The location and the alignment of these surfaces seemed to mirror the projected alignment of a trackway in the Saxon period (Fig 5). Although there were no artefacts directly associated with these surfaces their stratigraphic location placed them anywhere between the late Saxon and early medieval periods. The cobble surfaces overlie a series of alluvial deposits (contexts 107, 113 and 118, 133 and 134), which could be given a *terminus post quem,* dated to the late Iron Age/early Roman period from the artefactual assemblage. Yet it is quite feasible that the alluvial deposits relate to a period of severe flooding in the mid-7th century, which caused disruption to the salt production, as the brine springs became contaminated with fresh water, and deposited a thick layer of silt and clay across the valley floor (Hurst and Hemmingway 1992).

The only other feature that may represent archaeological interest was that of a partially visible cut (context 121) and its associated fill (context 120) that could be seen in the eastern section of the trench. As the trench at this point was too deep and unstable to safely enter, the feature was only recorded from the ground surface and the single sherd of late Iron Age/early Roman briquetage pottery from this feature was retrieved from the machine-excavated spoil. As the feature was partially visible it is unclear as to its nature, though it may well form part of a shallow east-west linear cutting into the possible buried land surface/make-up layer (context 128), but restricted access made this impossible to confirm.

A small amount of residual artefacts were found within some of the later post-medieval deposits (contexts 105, 109 and 119), and these ranged from a small burnt, though relatively unabraded fragment of Roman samiam ware, to three sherds of pottery dating from the early 11th – 12th century which were also found within the foundation cut backfill (context 109) of the present brick building. An almost complete Roman quern stone was found within the backfill of an 18th century foundation cut (context 119). All of these finds were residual, but indicate a continuity of activity on or near this site for at least two thousand years.

Conclusions

The results of the watching brief show that this end of the High Street substantial buried deposits of post-medieval industrial waste truncated by later foundation cuts, wall footings and service trenches. Yet it also demonstrated that below these deposits lie a sequence of layers from the late Iron Age/early Roman period, along with a cobbled road surface of unknown date, but likely to be late Saxon-early medieval. The discovery of the cobbled surfaces running along a similar alignment to the present Rickett's Lane and the alluvial deposits to the south, along with their associated finds show that even after considerable truncation and deposition from 18th-20th century industrial activity in the area there still remains some well preserved archaeology potentially from the late Iron Age through to the early medieval periods lying in the northern half of the site, (some 2m below the present ground surface). The briquetage pottery found on site dates from the late Iron Age/early

Roman and would have been associated with the collection of the salt from the Droitwich brine springs, and these fragments were found within a sequence of alluvial layers under the cobbled surface representing severe flooding. Elsewhere in the vicinity such alluvial deposits have been dated to the 6th-7th centuries (Hurst and Hemingway 1992). This enables the overlying cobble surface to be stratigraphically located to potentially the late Saxon/early medieval periods.

The visible archaeological remains were mainly located in the northern half of the excavations, yet archaeology may be present elsewhere but still remaining unobserved below the considerable depth of later make-up layers. It is conceivable though that the cobbled surface, that runs along the same alignment as the present Rickett's Lane, also extends under the present road surface and therefore may be very well preserved. It is also feasible that in this area the probable late Iron Age/Roman/Saxon alluvial deposits also lie undisturbed under the cobbled surface.

Publication summary

The Service has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, the Service 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.

A watching brief was undertaken on behalf of Phillip Aldridge at 1A, High Street, Droitwich, Worcestershire (NGR SO 8995 6340). The watching brief was conducted within the tarmac yard/car park to the rear of the existing premises. The groundworks were observed, and revealed that, although there had been considerable later truncation by foundation cuts, wall footings and service trenches through a substantially deep deposit of 19th and 20th century industrial waste, a sequence of alluvial layers was discovered underneath. These alluvial deposits contained artefacts dating to the late Iron Age or Roman period. Overlying these alluvial layers was a partially exposed cobbled layer, possibly consisting of two phases and running in a north south direction under the present Rickett's Lane. This surface was interpreted as either a yard surface, or, more likely, the extant remains of a cobbled trackway leading down to the river, and possibly dates from the late Saxon/early medieval period.

Archive

Context records AS1	33
Fieldwork progress records AS2	4
Trench record sheets AS41	1
Photographic records AS3	3
Digital photographs	44
Drawings	6
Boxes of finds	1
Computer disks	

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Worcestershire County Museum
Hartlebury Castle, Hartlebury
Near Kidderminster
Worcestershire DY11 7XZ

Telephone 01299 250416

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Table 3: Deposit description

Context	Type Colour Texture	Description	Date *Terminus post quem* (if known)	Interpretation	Depth (below ground surface)
101	Grey tarmac	Tarmac	Modern	Present tarmac pavement	0 – 0.12m
102	Loose gravel and crushed stone	Hardcore layer	Modern	Make-up for 101	0.12 – 0.17m
103	Loose rubble	Contains brick, tile, sandstone blocks, sand and gravels	18th C +	Made ground, associated with brick wall 111	0.17 – 0.90m
104	Loose dark brown – black rubble layer	Occasional gravels, clinker and charcoal	Modern	Made ground	0.85 – 0.95m
105	Very dark brown – black friable silty sand	Contains high percentage of gritty sand, with occasional small pebbles and charcoal flecks		Made ground and / or deliberate dump deposit	0.90 – 1.30m
106	Friable dark brown – grey silty clay	Frequent organic remains, i.e. twigs, roots and occasional charcoal flecks. Also small pebbles		Made ground and / or deliberate dump deposit, same as 131	1.30 – 1.75m
107	Very fine blueish grey alluvial clay	Pockets of fluvial sand	Late Iron Age/ Roman	Natural alluvial and fluvial deposit	2.05m+
108	Well compacted sub-rounded pebbles (*c*.70 – 100mm)	Blueish grey alluvial clay and fluvial sand matrix		Cobble surface	1.70 – 1.90m
109	Loose rubble	Consists of brick, stone, gravel and sand	Post-medieval	Foundation cut backfill	0.18 – 2.05m
110	Steep sided, not fully excavated cut, filled by 109	Partially exposed in northwest corner of trench, not cleaned due to safety reasons	Modern	Foundation cut for present building	0.18 – 2.05m

Deposit description (cont.)

Context	Type Colour Texture	Description	Date *Terminus post quem* (if known)	Interpretation	Depth (below ground surface)
111	Brick and reinforced concrete wall footings	Wall structure	18th C +	Wall foundation of recently demolished brick structure to rear of present building	0 – 0.85m
112	Well compacted sub-rounded pebbles (50 – 90mm)	Mid – dark grey mixed fluvial sand and occasional blueish grey alluvial clay matrix		Cobbled surface	1.84 – 1.97m
113	Mid brown silty clay	Organic, waterlogged	Late Iron Age/ Roman	Buried land surface, same as 134	1.80 – 2.20m
114	Light cream friable silty sand	Frequent charcoal flecks and occasional sub-angular gravels		Dump deposit	0.83 – 0.90m
115	Friable dark brown silty clay	Occasional sand, grit and charcoal flecks		Levelling or dump deposit	1.25 – 1.35m
116	Loose light greenish blue gritty fluvial sand	Occasional blueish grey alluvial clay		Fluvial sand, same as 132	1.40 – 160m
117	Mid – dark brown silty clay	Occasional large sub-rounded pebbles with sand		Buried land surface or possible bank/ upcast to the east of cobbled surface 108	135 – 1.76m
118	Dark grey / blue plastic 'oily' alluvial clay	Occasional large sub-rounded pebbles with organic material	Late Iron Age/ Roman?	Alluvial clay, same 133	1.58 – 1.72m
119	Very loose rubble	Contains brick, sand and gravel	Modern	Fill of foundation cut 129	0 – 1.51m

Deposit description (cont.)

Context	Type Colour Texture	Description	Date *Terminus post quem* (if known)	Interpretation	Depth (below ground surface)
120	A firm light brown silty clay	Frequent fine sand	Late Iron Age/ Roman	Fill of unknown feature 121	2.00 – 2.12m
121	Shallow cut with gently sloping sides and concave base	Possible north - south linear Filled by 120	Late Iron Age/ Roman	Machine dug, only recorded from surface	2.00 – 2.12m
122	Very loose black / grey clinker deposit with a partially exposed circular? cut	Frequent charcoal and ash	Post-medieval	Industrial waste deposit. Not fully exposed or recorded due to very unstable / unsafe trench sides	? – 2.12m
123	Grey tarmac	Tarmac	Modern	Present tarmac yard / car park surface	0 – 0.10m
124	Loose dark grey gravels	Frequent brick and stone fragments	Modern	Makeup layer for 123	0.10 – 0.25m
125	Very loose dark grey / black ash and charcoal	Contains frequent bricks, probably from disturbance to wall footings 126	Post-medieval	Industrial waste deposit	0 – 0.45m
126	18 course brick footing	Wall structure	Post-medieval	Poorly preserved wall footing to rear of present building, now supporting a modern brick boundary wall	0 – 1.51m
127	Very loose black sand	Very frequent brick and tile rubble, clinker, charcoal and ash	Post-medieval/ Modern	Substantial industrial waste deposit / made-up ground. Not fully recorded due to safety reasons. Very unstable	0.45 – 2.00m

Deposit description (cont.)

Context	Type Colour Texture	Description	Date *Terminus post quem* (if known)	Interpretation	Depth (below ground surface)
128	Firm, compact light reddish brown clayey sand	Occasional gravels and small sub-angular burnt stone		Layer, only visible in eastern end of northern trench	2.00 – 2.29m
129	North south running linear cut with vertical sides and flat level base	Contains wall 126 and backfill 119	Modern	Foundation cut for wall 126	0 – 1.51m
130	Upright, in-situ timber	425 x 60 x 55mm axe trimmed timber stake		Cuts deposit 131,	1.35 – 1.80m
131	Friable dark greyish brown silty clay	Occasional small sub-angular gravels frequent organic materials, waterlogged	Late Iron Age/ Roman	Made ground? same as 106	1.58 – 1.70m
132	Loose light blueish green gritty fluvial sand	Occasional blueish grey alluvial clays	Late Iron Age/ Roman	Fluvial sand, same as 116	1.70 – 1.75m
133	Dark grey / blue plastic 'oily' alluvial clay	Occasional large sub-rounded pebbles with organic material	Late Iron Age/ Roman	Alluvial clay, Same as 118	1.71 – 1.76m
134	Mid brown silty clay	Organic, waterlogged	Late Iron Age/ Roman	Buried land surface, same as 113	1.74 – 1.83m
135	Loose light blueish green gritty sand	Occasional; blueish grey alluvial clay	Late Iron Age/ Roman	Fluvial sand	1.83 – 1.86m
136	Firm dark grey silty clay	Frequent sub-rounded pebbles (50mm)	Late Iron Age/ Roman	Undetermined layer, only partially visible in base of trench	1.86m+

Plate 1: Commencing groundworks at western end, facing east

Plate 2: Commencing groundworks at eastern end, facing west

Plate 3: Section 1, facing west

Plate 4: Section 2, facing east

Plate 5: Base of section 2 showing detail of cobbled surfaces 108 and 112, facing northeast

Plate 6: Detail of alluvial layers at base of section 5, facing northwest

Plate 7: Base of section 3 showing build up of alluvial deposits, facing northeast

Plate 8: Features 121 and 122, facing west