

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING
BRIEF AT 24, VINES LANE,
DROITWICH, WORCESTERSHIRE

James Goad and Erica Darch

Illustrated by Carolyn Hunt

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Project 2331
Report 1141
WSM 32252

Archaeological watching brief at 24, Vines Lane, Droitwich, Worcestershire

James Goad and Erica Darch

Background information

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| <i>Client</i> | Mr Philip Cheshire |
| <i>Site address</i> | 24, Vines Lane, Droitwich, Worcestershire |
| <i>National Grid Reference</i> | SO 8975 6372 |
| <i>Sites and Monuments Record reference</i> | WSM 32252 |
| <i>Planning authority</i> | Wychavon District Council |
| <i>reference</i> | W/02/1710 |
| <i>Brief</i> | AS 2002 |
| <i>Project design</i> | AS 2003 |
| <i>Project parameters</i> | IFA 1999 |

Previous archaeological work on the site

Vines Lane lies within an important part of historic Droitwich. The site of the watching brief lies adjacent to the Bays Meadow Roman villa (SAM 241;WSM 00678). This site was first discovered during the construction of the Wolverhampton to Oxford railway between 1847 and 1849. Red sandstone foundations, tessellated pavements, pottery and metalwork artefacts were amongst the discoveries (VCH I, 208). At various intervals over the intervening period it has been subject to archaeological investigations. Much of the archaeology on the site has been truncated by the construction of the railway and by the siting of the present industrial buildings (Topping 1998; Vaughan 2001). In 2000 modern post holing activity revealed the remnant of the rampart associated with the Roman town (Williams and Jones 2000). Further east along Vines Lane a Roman cemetery has been located (WSM02343) between numbers 52-58, and further to the west two Romano-British burials (WSM04156 and WSM00252) have been excavated. One of these (WSM00252) was located, along with Roman finds, at no 32. Along the western end of Vines Lane there is a Roman road beneath some of the properties (WSM22016). Occupation continued around Vines Lane into the Saxon period (WSM22032).

Previous archaeological work on associated sites

Droitwich has been subject to a recent survey undertaken as part of the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey (Buteux and Hurst, 1996), which contains a summary of previous archaeological work in the town.

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.

Methods

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| General specification for watching brief | CAS 1995, IFA 1999 |
| Sources consulted | SMR Sources cited by the SMR 1:10000 1 st edition Ordnance Survey |

| | |
|--|---|
| Date of fieldwork | 2:10000 2 nd edition Ordnance Survey |
| Area of deposits observed | 3:10000 3 rd edition Ordnance Survey |
| Dimensions of excavated areas observed | 3 rd February 2003 |
| | c 44m ² in plan. Indicated on Fig 2 |
| | Foundations length 5.30-5.50m |
| | width 0.80-0.95m |
| | depth 1.08m |
| | Services length 1.20m |
| | width 1m |
| | depth 0.90m |

Access to and visibility of deposits

Observation of the excavated area was undertaken after mini-digger excavation and during additional hand excavation to remove spoil and material inaccessible to the machine. The exposed surfaces were sufficiently clean to observe well differentiated archaeological deposits. Trench 1 totalled about 42m² in plan whilst Trench 2 was 1.20m². The sections and base were all cleaned by hand to define the archaeology. Work progressed around the construction staff, who were working in Trench 1 as recording was carried out.

Statement of confidence

Access to, and visibility of, deposits allowed a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved. A high degree of confidence may be placed in the conclusions of this project.

Table 1

Deposit descriptions

| Context | Type Colour Texture | Description | Date | Interpretation | Depth (below ground level) |
|---------|------------------------------|--|----------------------|---|----------------------------|
| 100 | | | | Machine excavation | |
| 101 | | Concrete | Modern | Kerbing for path around no.24 | 0-0.20m |
| 102 | Sticky mid grey silty clay | Moderate rooting, occasional small to medium rounded stones | Modern/post-medieval | Dumped layer | 0.20-0.64m |
| 103 | Friable mid brown sandy clay | Occasional light rooting, occasional charcoal. No finds | Unknown | Layer | 0.60-0.90m |
| 104 | Sticky dark grey sandy silt | Quite mixed in appearance with abundant patches of brown sandy clay similar to 103. Occasional light rooting | Modern | Layer. Probably a dumped deposit consisting of some material derived from 103 | 0.60-0.90m |
| 105 | Sticky dark grey silty sand | Abundant heavy rooting. Moderate small and medium | Modern | Layer of garden soil | 0-0.60m |

| | | | | | |
|-----|--|--|------------------|---|------------|
| | | rounded stones. Moderate large roots | | | |
| 106 | Sticky dark grey silty clay | Occasional light rooting and occasional small stones | Post-medieval? | Dumped layer | 0.60-1.12m |
| 107 | Sticky dark grey silty sand | Abundant rooting and occasional small stones | Modern | Same as 105 | 0-0.60m |
| 108 | Friable dark grey sandy clay | Occasional small rounded stones. Some pottery sherds recovered | Roman | Ditch fill of ditch 109 | 0.90-1.10m |
| 109 | BST-Sharp Sides-Vertical BSB-Sharp Base-Flat | Ditch orientated roughly north-east to south-west. Possibly turning in a northerly direction. Filled by 108. Cuts clay layer 112 | Roman | Edge of Roman ditch. Could it be associated with the Bays Meadow villa? | 0.90-1.10m |
| 110 | Firm reddish sandy clay | Abundant medium-sized rounded stones pressed in to the top of the deposit | | Probably natural. Possible cobbled surface/road. | 1.10m |
| 111 | Friable mid brown silty sand | Abundant brick and mortar rubble | Modern | Dumped layer of demolition material | 0.53-0.60m |
| 112 | Friable mid brown sandy clay | Similar to layer 103 but with fewer inclusions. Cut by ditch 109. Visible in plan only | Roman | Layer | 1.10m |
| 113 | Friable mixed red and white silty sand | Visible in plan only | Roman/post-Roman | Layer. Possible area of burning | 1.05m |

Artefactual assemblage

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

All hand-retrieved finds were examined. Artefacts were identified, quantified, dated and recorded on a Microsoft Access 1997 database. A *terminus post quem* (TPQ) was assigned to each stratified context. The pottery was examined and recorded by fabric type according to the fabric reference series maintained by the Service (Hurst and Rees 1992).

The artefacts were recovered from unstratified material and three stratified contexts. They were mostly highly abraded, small fragments and dated to the Roman and post-medieval / modern periods. There were no form sherds in the pottery assemblage, and all the fabrics present were produced in the Midlands region (L Griffin, pers comm). The artefacts recovered can be seen in Table 2, below.

Table 2

| Context | Material | Fabric Number | Total | Weight (g) | Date range | Period |
|---------|----------|---------------|-------|------------|-------------|-------------------------|
| U/S | BONE | | 1 | 16 | | |
| U/S | BRICK | | 1 | 26 | | Post-medieval to modern |
| U/S | POT | 12.1 | 1 | 3 | M1 - 4th C | Romano-British |
| 106 | BRICK | | 2 | 160 | | Post-medieval to modern |
| 108 | POT | 12 | 5 | 14 | M1 - 4th C | Romano-British |
| 108 | POT | 23 | 1 | 3 | M4th - E5th | Romano-British |
| 203 | POT | | 1 | 10 | M1 - 4th C | Romano-British |
| 203 | BRICK | 12 | 1 | 22 | | Post-medieval to modern |
| 203 | STONE | | 1 | 101 | | |

Fabric numbers

12 = Severn Valley ware

12.1 = Reduced Severn Valley Ware

23 = Shell gritted ware

Although there was Roman material from several layers, the only context that could be assigned a *TPQ* in the Roman period was 108, with a date of mid 4th – early 5th century from a sherd of shell gritted ware (fabric 23). Contexts 106 and 203 both have a *TPQ* of post-medieval / modern from abraded fragments of brick.

Discussion

The trench for the new house was excavated to a considerable depth (over 1m) in order to reach a suitable deposit for the concrete footings to rest on. The sections of the trench revealed a series of dumped layers dating to the post-medieval and modern periods, with the base of the trench revealing a brown clay (context 112). This layer was cut by the only archaeological feature detected (context 109). The full extent of the feature was not determined as only part of it was visible in the base of the trench. The feature was sectioned and determined to be the edge of a ditch. The pottery recovered from the ditch fill was dated to the Roman period.

In section, layer 103 appears to have been truncated on the western side of the trench, possibly by the construction of no. 24. Otherwise it seems to feature in all the sections of the trench and directly overlies all the archaeological deposits. It's overlain by a series of dumped layers, which have been used as levelling on the site. Layer 105/107 would appear to be a straightforward garden soil.

Although there is only a small amount of Roman material, this is consistent with what is already known about the area, as a Roman Villa, cemeteries and a Roman road have been located nearby. It is also known that Roman features in Vines Lane have been disturbed, and so residual Roman material would be expected (AS 2002).

The impact of the development at no 24 will have virtually no impact upon the archaeology found there. The trench was excavated to a depth that came down directly on top of the archaeology, but did not disturb it. The layers of material dug through by the mini-digger were all dumped layers of a post-medieval or modern date.

Conclusions

Roman activity can be proven to extend to this portion of Vines Lane. Although the feature located cannot be firmly identified, it was most likely to be a ditch but it could also possibly have been the edge of a very large pit. Unfortunately the size of the area investigated did not enable the feature to be fully excavated to determine its extent.

The ditch may be related in some way to the Bays Meadow villa, or might be part of a much more modest settlement that existed side-by-side with the more high status development. Perhaps it's reasonable to presume that this ditch could be a field boundary, and thus part of the field system outside the villa complex.

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 Philip Cheshire at 24, Vines Lane, Droitwich (NGR SO 89756372; WSM 32252). The watching brief located the edge of a feature, which was probably a ditch dating to the Roman period. This might have been a field boundary associated with the Bays Meadow villa located under the modern industrial complex on the opposite side of Vines lane from this development. No other structural remains were found during the course of the groundworks.

Archive

| | |
|---------------------------------|----|
| Fieldwork progress records AS2 | 1 |
| Photographic records AS3 | 1 |
| Colour transparency photographs | 29 |
| Black and white photographs | 29 |
| Trench record sheets AS41 | 1 |
| Drawings | 4 |
| Boxes of finds | 1 |
| Computer disks | 1 |

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Worcestershire County Museum
Hartlebury Castle, Hartlebury
Near Kidderminster
Worcestershire DY11 7XZ
01299 250416

telephone

Acknowledgements

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