

**A lead pig from Westbury**

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Extracted from the Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society for 2016.

Volume 160

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Produced in Great Britain by Short Run Press, Exeter.

ISSN 0081-2056

## A LEAD PIG FROM WESTBURY-SUB-MENDIP AND THE ORIGINS OF THE SETTLEMENT

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In May 2016, a lead pig was discovered on land belonging to David Limond of Furlong Farm, Westbury-sub-Mendip (PAS reference SOM-23F798: figure 1). It weighs about 19.3kg and measures 521mm in length by 96.7mm on its upper face, varying in thickness (the author is indebted to Julie Shoemark for the physical description). It has the typical laminar appearance of an ingot cast in an open mould and bears the raised inscription: IMP DVOR AVG ANTONINI / ET VERI ARMENIACORVM, that is of the joint emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus acclaimed with the victory title of Armeniacorum. The pig is tightly dated to the period between the assumption of this title in AD 164 to commemorate the retaking of the kingdom of Armenia and its capital, Artaxata, and the end of the joint reign, cut short by the death of Verus in AD 169 (Scarre 1995, 113).

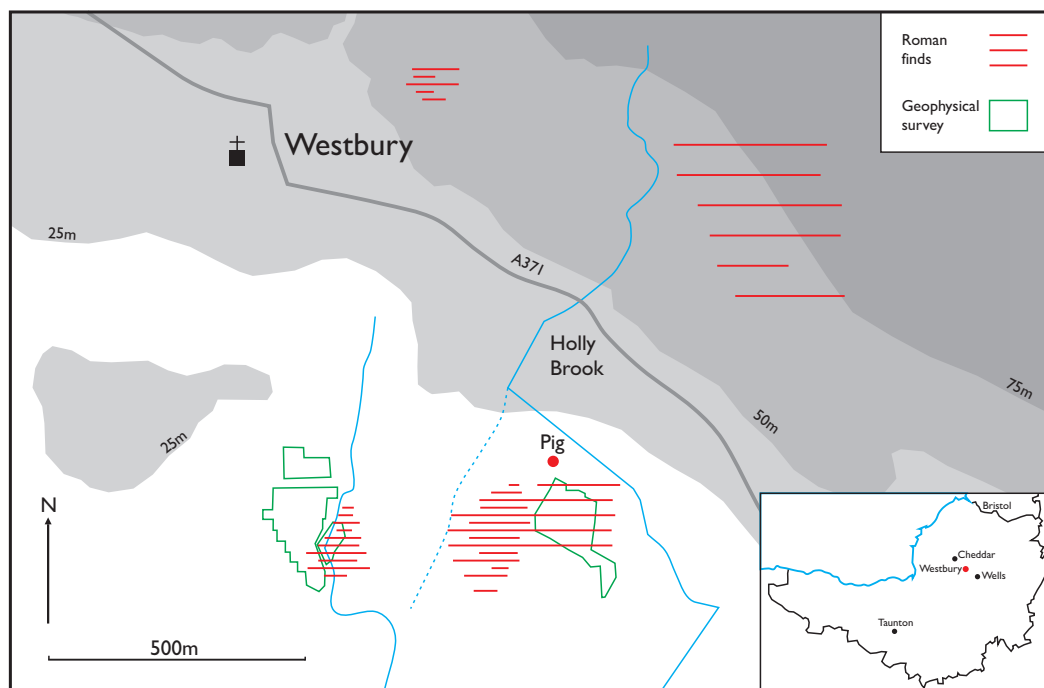


Fig. 1 The Westbury lead pig. The inscription reads IMP DVOR AVG ANTONINI / ET VERI ARMENIACORVM. Photograph by courtesy of the Portable Antiquities Scheme

Of the 3,000 or more lead ingots recovered from over the Roman Empire, there are only five including the Westbury ingot with similar inscriptions to the two emperors. All come from within an 18-mile radius of Charterhouse-on-Mendip. They have been listed by Malcolm Todd (2007, 69-71, 84): Todd 24 is now lost but is recorded by John Leland in about 1530 as ploughed up in Wells (RIB II 2040.20); Todd 23 also now lost was noted and

illustrated by William Stukeley in his *Itinerarium Curiosum* of 1753 as found while digging a posthole near Bruton and seen by him 'at Longleat, my lord Weymouth's library' (RIB II 2040.19); Todd 25 and 26 are both fragments found in Town Field at Charterhouse-on-Mendip around 1874, which were given to SANHS in 1883 by A. Cappa Pass and are currently displayed in the Museum of Somerset (RIB II 2040.21 and 22). These two fragments are illustrated and described in volume 1 of the Victoria County History (Page 1906, 337, fig 91, and 342-3). It is notable that both are much thinner than the Westbury ingot and the more common Vespasianic examples. All three surviving pieces seem from photographs to be from very similar moulds but will need detailed comparison to establish if they are identical. The Westbury pig was discovered by Jason Baker during a metal detectorists rally. It was recorded by Julie Shoemark of the Somerset Portable Antiquities Scheme and subsequently put up for auction where it was acquired by the South West Heritage Trust on behalf of Somerset County Council (acc. no. TTNCM: 37/2017). Negotiations over agreement of ownership and display with Wells and Mendip Museum are continuing.

The Westbury Society had already established that there was evidence of Roman occupation on low-lying land on the farm, perhaps with evidence of a bath house, when a wildlife pond was built in 1990 (Lane 2006; Somerset HER 25648) (figure 2). Geophysical surveying in 2006 by Nick Mayor and Austin Little on adjacent land found evidence of buried structures (Lane 2011: Somerset HER 27167). The rally was held nearby covering an area of higher ground as yet to be researched by the Westbury Society and recovered substantially more evidence of occupation. This included two coin hoards: one of denarii dating to the late 2nd-century (PAS reference SOM-F1847A); the other of late 3rd-century radiates (PAS reference WILT-131821; generously donated by David Limond and the finder, Simon Guerrero, to Wells and Mendip Museum acc. no. WELWM: 2017.12); and the lead pig. Splashes of lead were also found. Later geophysical surveying by Nick Mayor and Austin Little and processing of the data by Andy Payne of Historic England revealed traces of rectilinear structures in this area (figure 3). Andy Payne



*Fig. 2 The extent of evidence of Roman occupation in Westbury-sub-Mendip and its relationship to the find spot of the lead pig. The possible former course of the Holly Brook is marked as a broken blue line. Drawing by Chris Webster*

comments, 'what looks suspiciously like a Roman system of rectilinear enclosures defined by ditches and possibly double-ditched drove-ways in places [is] located in the top (east) part of the plots.'

It appears that the lead pig was brought to the site for use perhaps to provide lead for plumbing for the building complex. There is plentiful evidence for a local market in lead. It was used for many purposes at sites like Herriott's Bridge, now under Chew Valley Lake, and for the local pewter industry as at Camerton (Rahtz and Greenfield 1977, 78-9; Wedlake 1958, 95). It is possible to link the presence of a pig with a suggestion that the building complex, perhaps a 'villa' had its own water supply. The lie of the land suggests that the Holly Brook (?Holly Brook) once flowed directly down to the low point of Teenmead (the name means 'willow field'), the site of the new wildlife pond. The present stream takes a sharp turn to the right (east) and skirts round the boundaries of the medieval bishop's deer park. It had been assumed that the diversion had been made at or around the time of the park's enclosure, but the recent finds suggest the possibility that the

diversion could have been made to serve the 'villa'. If this is the case the deer park may have been laid out over the site of the 'villa' enclosing fields with the suggestive name of Thornbury.

One might further speculate the 'villa' had its own water shrine, a minor version of the shrines postulated at Wookey Hole and Wells (Lane 2011; Rodwell 2001, 52-3). Further at some point the 'villa' may have been Christianised and even, to pursue a long-neglected idea, perhaps became the site of a monastery (Morris 1989, 100-4). No matter what the situation really was, the new finds change our view of the origins of settlement at Westbury-sub-Mendip and open new lines of enquiry.

Thanks are due to Laura Burnett of the Portable Antiquities Scheme, Chris Webster of the Somerset Historic Environment Record, Andy Payne of Historic England, and Sue Isherwood Lane, Nicky Amos and Andrew Buchanan of the Westbury Society for their help, advice and comments in compiling this note. Chris Webster also prepared figure 2. Steve Minnitt, Head of Museums of the South West Heritage Trust, and David Walker,

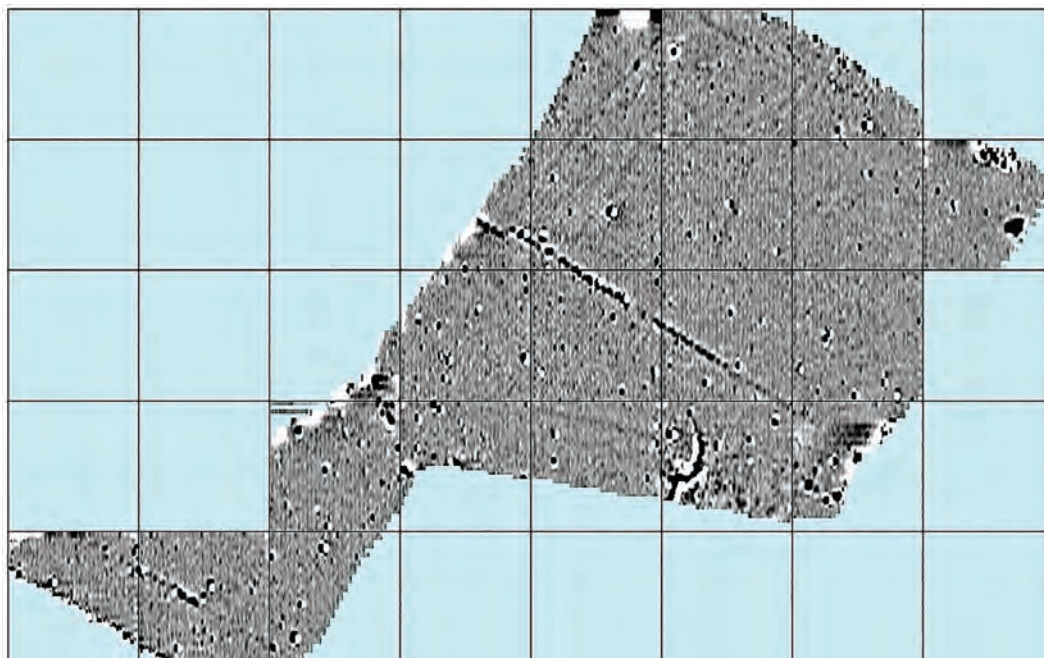


Fig. 3 Geophysical survey of the adjoining field showing traces of rectilinear structures. North is to the left. Image by courtesy of Andy Payne of Historic England from survey data supplied by Nick Mayor and Austin Little of the Westbury Society

Hon. Curator of Wells and Mendip Museum, kindly confirmed the relevant accessions.

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- Sadly Barry died on 4th March 2017 leaving this paper in preparation for a lecture at the SANHS Archaeology Day at Wells and Mendip Museum and the basis of publication – David Dawson.*