

ROMAN FINDS AT FORD FARM, BAWDRIP

Between 2002 and 2003 Bridgwater and District Archaeological Society excavated a site at Ford Farm Bawdrip. In 2009 the author obtained a grant from the Maltwood Fund to archive these finds. The excavations revealed the remains of what BDAS believed to be a large 'Romano-British villa', in an area where other Romano-British evidence had been

recovered. The site is on the southern slope of the Polden Hills, which form a ridge dividing the central Somerset Levels, with Sedgemoor to the south and the Brue valley to the north. The ridge is capped by Blue Lias limestone, which to the south forms a steep scarp. Near Ford Farm (Fig. 1), where the Lias has been exposed, it may have been quarried and the



Fig. 1 The Ford Farm site on the southern slope of the Polden Hills

presence of tufa rock and springs also on the site may be significant. Leach (2001, 84) uses the term ‘native landscape’ to describe Somerset during the Romano-British period, dependent upon a rural, pastoral economy. The range of artefacts which comprise the assemblage is dominated by pottery but also includes animal bone, plaster, coins and other metal finds, including brooches.

As it was not possible to locate precisely the position of trenches from the excavation records, a geophysical survey was carried out. The north-eastern section lay in the orchard and the south-western area in cultivated land. The orchard was difficult to survey but a number of positive anomalies were recorded. It was possible that some of these were areas of tufa rock but there were indications of two crossing track ways. One ran approximately north–south and was a probable continuation of Ford Lane from Stawell, leading up to the Roman road running along the Polden ridge.

Further archaeological investigation is required to explore some of these possibilities. In the South Field, the large positive anomalies were flanked by other less strong anomalies. The latter were rectangular and reflected similar alignments on the

other side of the lane. Further to the north-west of the South Field survey, probable stone foundations from the excavations lay below the stronger anomaly. Backfilling, compression of excavation trenches, demolition spread from the building or tufa could have been indicated. A continuation of the rectangular anomalies to the south-east of the orchard site, albeit faint, suggested the extension of the building. The building foundations revealed in the BDAS’s excavation were therefore positioned with some degree of confidence. Their estimate was of a building measuring approximately 38m by 20m, with evidence for twelve rooms. Figure 2 shows the geophysical survey results. Resistivity was used in the Orchard and magnetometry in the arable field to the south. A diagram drawn by the Bridgwater Archaeology team has been used as an overlay to show the approximate position of their trenches.

The pottery assemblage provided a comprehensive range of Romano-British vessels, including high-status fine wares such as samian ware, but chiefly consisted of unglazed earthenware vessels. The colour of the pottery ranged from orange through grey or black depending on the source of the clay and the firing. Most vessels were thrown on a wheel, but some kitchen wares were hand-made and fired in simple kilns or perhaps bonfires. It was not possible to ascertain whether this was the complete finds assemblage from the excavations. By far the largest amount of pottery, apart from indeterminate material, was Black-burnished ware, at 61.8%, which is similar to other Romano-British sites in Somerset (Leach 2001; Rippon 2008). There was a comparatively large amount of amphora (5.1% by sherd count), similar to Crandon Bridge, Shepton Mallet and to Sea Mills. The most characteristic were a flat based, Gaulish type (Fig. 3). These were developed during the 1st century AD and continued to be produced and exported into the 3rd century. The colour and fabric of the amphora found at Ford Farm point towards the samples being Type Gaulish 4. The amount of Oxfordshire and New Forest wares was small in comparison with most other Somerset sites quoted. It is possible that the oxidized ware could be included in the Oxfordshire ware category, comparable with Crandon Bridge oxidized wares, some of which were thought to be Oxford sandy wares (Rippon 2008, 111). A small amount of samian ware was found of indeterminate type. Ford Farm grey gritty ware, 1.3% by sherd count, was comparable with material from Ilchester, type fabric CW (Leach 1982, 142), and from Exeter (Holbrook and Bidwell 1991, 171–4).

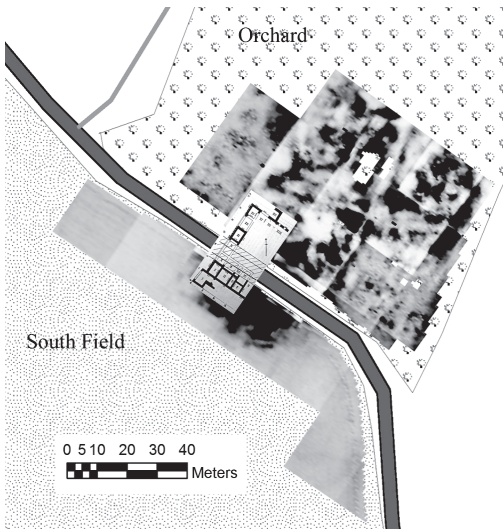


Fig. 2 Geophysical survey at Ford Farm, 2009, with superimposed plan of excavated buildings

The importance of the relationship between the Ford Farm site and the Roman road, the present A39, cannot be understated. During the Roman period, Ilchester was a major Roman centre and the Fosse Way connected with this road which provided a main route from south-east Dorset through the ports of Crandon Bridge and Combwich, across the Severn Estuary to Wales. This may explain the relatively large proportion of Dorset Black-burnished ware. Much of the grey ware was probably local and appears to imitate Black-burnished types, probably spanning the same period as the obtuse lattice forms of Black-burnished ware.

Of the painted wall plaster, the majority was found in the Orchard area. If this is a true representation of the spread of plaster material, it might indicate that the higher status rooms were located in the northern area of the building. The Romano-British sites at Shapwick have produced similar material to that at Ford Farm. At the Shapwick sites, plaster was found in contexts dated to the mid to late 2nd century and 3rd to 4th-century contexts (Gerrard with Aston 2007, 825). The coins found at Ford Farm cover the Roman period from *c.* AD 41 to AD 378. Although the number of coins is small, the dating pattern peaks in the middle of the 4th century. There is one coin of the medieval period, dated approximately to the late 16th or early 17th century. There was no definite information as to the find spot for six of the coins, but two were found in the Orchard.

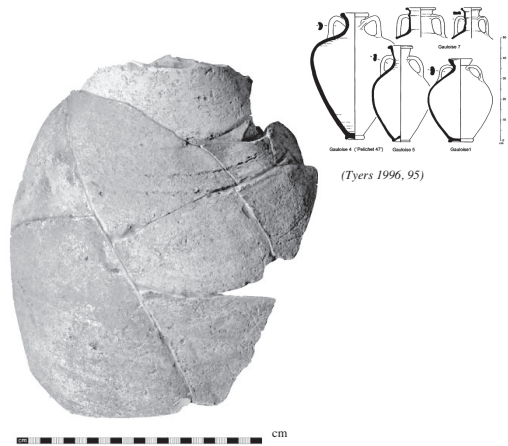


Fig. 3 A Gaulish flat-based amphora from Ford Farm

The evidence from Ford Farm suggests it was a late Romano-British corridor or courtyard building, possibly part of a farming community, with links both local and long distance. Evidence from Crandon Bridge and other sites along the Polden ridge has indicated that the area in which Ford Farm lies was a centre of late Romano-British commercial activity.

The archaeological archive is held by the Blake Museum, Bridgwater, as a gift from Paul and Caroline Warren of Ford Farm, Bawdrip.

References

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