

Excavation of a Roman coastal occupation site at the Ham Price Building, Weston College, Weston-super-Mare, North Somerset

Andrew Young, with contributions by Lisa Gray, Ron J.Gurney, Lorraine Higbee, Malin Holst, Matt Law, Sarah News and Jane Timsby

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EXCAVATION OF A ROMAN COASTAL OCCUPATION SITE AT THE HANS PRICE BUILDING, WESTON COLLEGE, WESTON-SUPER-MARE, NORTH SOMERSET

ANDREW YOUNG

with contributions by Lisa Gray, Ron J. Gurney, Lorraine Higbee, Malin Holst, Matt Law,
Sarah News and Jane Timby

SUMMARY

This report sets out the preliminary results of archaeological investigations undertaken by Avon Archaeology between 2008 and 2009 at the School of Science and Art designed by Hans Price, Weston-super-Mare, part of the Knightstone Campus of Weston College, located off South Terrace. The project involved a staged programme of archaeological work undertaken in advance of proposed redevelopment and extension of the Hans Price site by Weston College, in accordance with a Condition attached to planning consent issued by North Somerset Council (Reference 08/P/1596/F, Condition 20).

The fieldwork programme included preliminary evaluation trenching followed by detailed area excavation, the latter designed to fully investigate

and record buried structural features and deposits of Roman date identified during the evaluation work. The project recorded important evidence of a late Roman settlement site of the early to mid-4th century AD that was preserved in a sequence of windblown sands. The principal evidence recorded included the remains of a substantial masonry building that was bounded on the north side by a recut boundary ditch and an outer kerb of limestone boulders. A single crouched human burial was recovered from a shallow grave immediately adjacent to the enclosure ditch.

Note - What follows represents only the preliminary results of the archaeological fieldwork undertaken on the site as Weston College were not willing to commission the analysis, reporting and publication work required by the planning Condition and as set out in the project post excavation assessment stage



Fig. 1 General site location.
Scale shown



Fig. 2 Location of the excavation area. Scale shown

Updated Project Design (Young 2010). Similarly, North Somerset Council were unwilling to enforce the need for the analysis and publication stage work to be undertaken.

LOCATION AND BACKGROUND

Weston College commissioned a programme of archaeological evaluation in 2008 (Avon Archaeological Unit 2008) and subsequent excavation in 2009, in advance of the construction of new college premises at the rear of the Hans Price School of Science and Art, off South Terrace in Weston-super-Mare (Figs 1 and 2). The excavation stage work was arranged through appointed agents BBA Architects and followed on from an initial stage of evaluation trenching, in accordance with the requirements of North Somerset Council. The excavation site was centred at NGR ST 3172 6184 and encompassing an area of 200 square metres of former car park on the southern side of South Terrace. The site was bounded to the east and south by college buildings and to the west by No.1 Park Villas. The excavation fieldwork was carried out between August and October 2009.

SITE SETTING AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

South Terrace extends east to west along the southern flank of Worlebury Hill, close to Knightstone Road and the modern seafront, at c 8m above Ordnance Datum. The excavation site (Fig. 2) is essentially level and is underlain by Carboniferous limestone bedrock and Holocene alluvium of the Wentlooge Formation, which in turn is overlain by a sequence of windblown sands that extend inland for up to 1km. A geotechnical survey in 2008 recorded windblown sands underlying the site in excess of 3m thick, in places interbedded with thin horizons of estuarine alluvium that produced animal bone (Structural Soils 2008).

Prior to the 19th century residential development of the area, the local environment consisted of a coastal windblown dune bank that separated the sea from an area of inland saltmarsh. The dune barrier does not, however, appear to have been continuous and there is evidence that the Hans Price site lay close to the route of a former watercourse or creek, which extended inland from the coast at Knightstone along the foot of Worlebury Hill and east towards the former wetland of Milton and Ashcombe. This possibility

was first somewhat unintentionally highlighted by E Y Poole in 1885, who drew together records of archaeological finds, including numerous reports of human burials and the remains of ‘an ancient galley’ (HER130), in relation to local topography and postulated their relationship to the ‘ancient high water line’ at the foot of Worlebury Hill (Fig. 3). Evidence for the local palaeogeography was further considered and developed by Chris Richards in his unpublished essay entitled ‘Weston’s Lost River’ in which he draws together a range of late 18th- and 19th-century documentary sources that, in combination with modern topographical information including Environment Agency flood mapping, supports the presence of a former tidal inlet, creek or watercourse (HER 40367) that once extended inland from Knightstone along the southern flank of Worlebury Hill.

The North Somerset HER includes evidence for an extended period of occupation of the late prehistoric Camp on Worlebury Hill, where numerous rock-cut pits have been recorded, a substantial number of which contained human burials. Further Iron Age and Roman burials have been found outside the Camp on the southern foot slope of the hill (e.g. HERs 41379, 41380 and 41382), including a late prehistoric crouched pit-inhumation discovered in 2006 during works in the churchyard of St. John’s church (Broomhead 2006).

In addition to burials, findspots of Roman building remains accompanied by domestic pottery and coins were recorded at several locations during the building of Royal Crescent, the adjacent Crosby Hall and Park Villas during the 19th century (HERs 124 and 127). Further evidence was recorded at the Hans Price

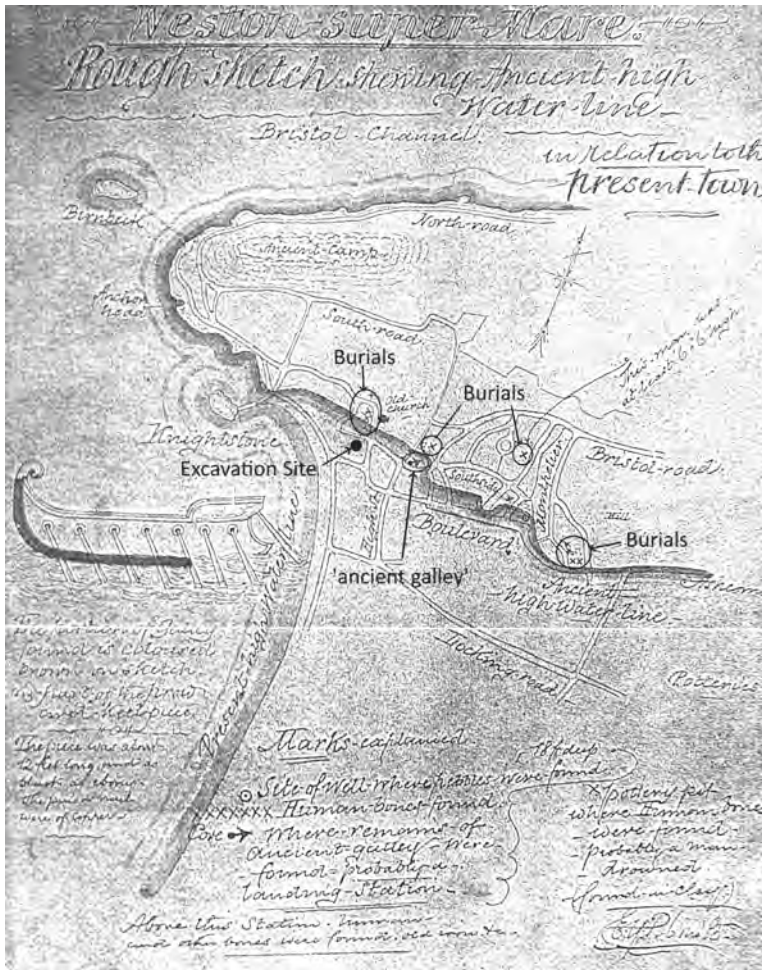


Fig. 3 E. Y. Poole’s map of 1885 with annotation by the writer (reproduced courtesy of Weston Museum)



Fig. 4 Photograph taken by the late Keith Gardner showing Sergeant George Roberts recording the sewerage inspection chamber pit at the Hans Price site in 1959. Facing NW (reproduced courtesy of North Somerset Museum)

college site itself in 1959, directly adjacent to the 2009 excavation area, where local amateur archaeologist, Sergeant George Rodgers, identified Roman remains preserved in a sequence of windblown sands during the digging of a new sewer inspection chamber (Fig. 4). Evidence identified by Rodgers included parts of a masonry building and finds of pottery, coins, animal bone and a fine enamelled disc brooch (Fig. 5). His records indicate that he also located the remains of Roman timber structures just to the west of the Hans Price site in the area of Park Villas. The records of his work, although never published, are held by North Somerset Museum.

The discoveries made by Sergeant Rodgers, in combination with the large number of documented Roman burials and finds recorded in the Historic Environment Record, indicate that a focal zone of late prehistoric and Roman settlement-related and funerary activity once extended between Greenfield



Fig. 5 Roman enamelled disc brooch of the 2nd-3rd century AD recovered by Sergeant Rodgers in 1959 (reproduced courtesy North Somerset Museum)

Place in the West, Upper Church Road and St John's Church in the East (Avon Extensive Urban Areas Survey 1998, Maps A and B).

FIELDWORK 2008-09

The two stages of fieldwork undertaken on the site involved a preliminary evaluation trench followed by detailed area excavation. The excavation identified buried archaeology reflecting three periods (Periods I to III) of activity dating between the later Roman period and the 21st century.

Evidence of Period I Roman settlement activity was represented by the remains of a masonry building, which was bounded on the north side by a substantial ditch and an outer kerb of large limestone boulders. The building was associated with a sequence of sandy soils indicative of former coastal dune banks, some of which had been worked agriculturally. Evidence that the settlement was sited either on or close to the littoral margin of the contemporary coastline is indicated by the molluscan evidence, which suggests episodic marine inundation of the enclosure ditch. A limited assemblage of associated artefacts indicates the site was of modest status and occupied for perhaps just a generation during the early to mid-4th century AD, although the site chronology was not established with certainty due to a lack of dating evidence for the earliest phase of Roman activity. During the later phase of Roman occupation, a single crouched inhumation burial was placed outside the building, immediately inside the boundary ditch. The site

appears to have been abandoned for a prolonged period thereafter, when the Roman deposits were sealed with culturally sterile windblown sands that filled the enclosure ditch and over which a deep sandy soil horizon subsequently accumulated. Thereafter, the site remained undeveloped until the modern period, when a boundary or drainage ditch was opened in the early 18th century and the Hans Price Building subsequently erected in 1893.

The excavation produced a significant assemblage of stratified finds including pottery, animal bone, coins and other metalwork, charred plant macrofossils, molluscs and the single human burial, all of which, with one notable exception, were assessed by appropriate specialists during preliminary post excavation work.

Evaluation (2008)

The footprint of the proposed development occupied a car park located to the rear (west) of the Hans Price Building, was evaluated by a trial trench in 2008 (Fig. 6). The work was undertaken as part of planning consent and designed to determine the presence or absence of Roman deposits previously suggested by Sergeant George Rodgers and, if present, to characterise and date the activity represented. A single evaluation trench some 13m long and 2m wide was opened parallel to the rear of the building and excavated to a maximum depth of 1.8m (6.3m aOD) below the modern ground surface, at which point waterlogged sands were reached.

Evidence for two phases of Roman activity separated by a sterile sand deposit and broadly dating to the 3th and 4th centuries AD was identified in a deep sequence of windblown sands. Pottery sherds and animal bone were recovered in association with an area of localised burning and an adjacent rubble deposit, tentatively interpreted as the remains of a former hearth utilised during the earlier phase of activity. The hearth was subsequently sealed by some 300mm of windblown sands, above which a section of wall formed of limestone rubble was founded to the north of which a contemporary enclosure or drainage ditch aligned SW to NE was dug. Sherds of Roman, medieval and post-medieval pottery were retrieved from the deep horizon of sandy soil that overlay the Roman deposits. This in turn was cut by an 18th-century ditch and several modern services prior to the formation of the modern carpark.

A standard range of domestic artefacts was recovered from the Roman deposits, although, unlike Sergeant Rodgers' finds (above), no personal items such as coins or brooches were found. The ecofacts indicated shellfish were exploited alongside cattle



Fig. 6 The 2008 evaluation trench at the School of Science and Art. Facing S

and sheep/goat for protein in the diet and hinted at a shoreline environment consisting of dune grassland and areas of estuarine silts and sands. The evaluation confirmed the presence of significant buried archaeological structures and deposits of Roman date, which would be impacted by the proposed Hans Price development.

Excavation (2009)

Due to the evidence revealed in the evaluation trench North Somerset Council required further detailed area excavation adjacent to the rear of the Hans Price building, in order to fully investigate and record the buried archaeological structures and deposits that would be impacted by the footprint of the new building. The excavation area (Figs 2 and 3) encompassed approximately 200 square metres that was investigated over a period of eight weeks between August and October 2009. Preliminary work involved the demolition of two ancillary structures that butted the Hans Price building and the removal of modern concrete surfacing.

The archaeology recorded in the excavation area is subdivided into three periods and seven phases of

activity ranging in date from the later Roman period through to the 21st century. These are summarised below.

Period I: Roman (3rd to 4th centuries AD)

Four distinct phases of Roman structural activity were recorded on the site, most of which were separated by or interbedded with episodic deposition or movement of windblown sands. Of the four phases, the first three were represented by evidence for indeterminate activity recorded mainly over the southern half of the excavation area, whilst the fourth involved the construction of a large rectangular masonry building set inside an enclosure defined by ditches to the north and west. A crouched inhumation burial immediately alongside the northern boundary possibly had been interred in the shoulder of the open ditch.

The pottery recovered from Roman features and deposits is provisionally dated typologically to the

late 2nd to 4th centuries AD (see Timby, below), however the stratigraphic sequence suggests the structural activity recorded dates to the later Roman period, broadly the 3rd to 4th centuries AD, and that the earlier sherds are likely to be residual in context.

Phase I.1

A sequence of fluvial sands, layers 756 and 631, possibly deposited during marine or estuarine inundation (see Law, below), were overlain by a scatter of limestone rubble (707) exposed at c. 6.5m aOD, approximately 1.5m below the modern carpark surface in the south-east of the site. Four small, abraded pottery sherds provisionally dated to the 3rd to 4th centuries AD were recovered in association with a small collection of animal bone from layer 631, which was cut by a linear soil feature (635) aligned north to south that was located alongside the rubble (707). It was not possible to determine the



Fig. 7 The excavation area in progress showing Building A and a section through boundary ditches C, D and E. Facing SW. Scales 1m and 500mm



Fig. 8 Plan showing the site as excavated. Scale shown

precise character of the Roman activity represented with any certainty although molluscs recovered from the deposits indicate an estuarine depositional environment.

Phase I.2

The second phase of Roman activity overlay Phase I.1 deposits and represented the deposition of up to 300mm of clean sands. These included Layer 706 (not illustrated), which was restricted to the southern third of the excavation area and differed markedly in colour from the sequence of windblown sands (layers 632 and 738 etc.) recorded to the north. Deposit 706 was examined by English Heritage Geoarchaeologist Matthew Canti, who concluded that it had possibly been reworked for agriculture with the addition of manure or seaweed as fertiliser.

Associated activity was represented by the remnants of a hearth, indicated by discrete areas of burning centred on a localised rubble spread (Figs

8, 128 and 129 respectively). The hearth had been constructed on the surface of a reworked or manured sand deposit (Layer 108), from which a single sherd of Roman greyware pottery provisionally dated to the 3rd to 4th centuries was recovered.

Note - The dating of the earlier phases of Roman activity (Phases I.1 and I.2) to the 3rd to 4th centuries AD is provisional and based on the identification of only a small collection of abraded Roman sherds. In view of this uncertainty further radiocarbon dating was proposed in the Updated Project Design (Avon Archaeological Unit 2010) in order to establish an independent chronology for the activity represented

Phase I.3

A subsequent sequence of windblown sands (layers 709/718/638/749, 704/716/694/748 and 710/738) up to 400 mm deep, some incorporating thin stabilisation layers represented by dark lenses and mottling, was

deposited over much of the site. In the north, these deposits were sealed by a dark brown sandy soil (632/672) that was up to 260 mm thick (Fig. 8).

Phase I.4

The final phase of Roman activity saw the construction of a substantial rectangular masonry structure (Fig. 8, Building A, Walls 712, 625, 623 and 658.) the long axis of which was aligned north-west to south-east, as indicated by surviving sections of the north, west and east walls (Fig. 9). The masonry was preserved to a maximum height of c 0.3m and formed of very roughly coursed and faced drystone rubble, the interstices of which were filled with brown sandy

soil indistinguishable from surrounding deposits. The masonry of the north wall (625) was founded upon a wider foundation course and, as preserved, the overall dimensions of the building measured 8.8m internally from SW to NE and in excess of 3.8m from NW to SE.

A discontinuous spread of red clay (702/705/758) and the remnants of a stone surface (715) appeared to reflect remnants of associated internal surfaces, the clay deposit producing seven of the eight Roman coins that were recovered on the site. A further short section of wall foundation (Wall 658) was aligned parallel to and outside the north wall (625) of the building. Unfortunately, the junction between the two sections of masonry had been disturbed by post



Fig. 9 Building A (Wall 625) and floor deposit 702 being excavated. Facing WNW

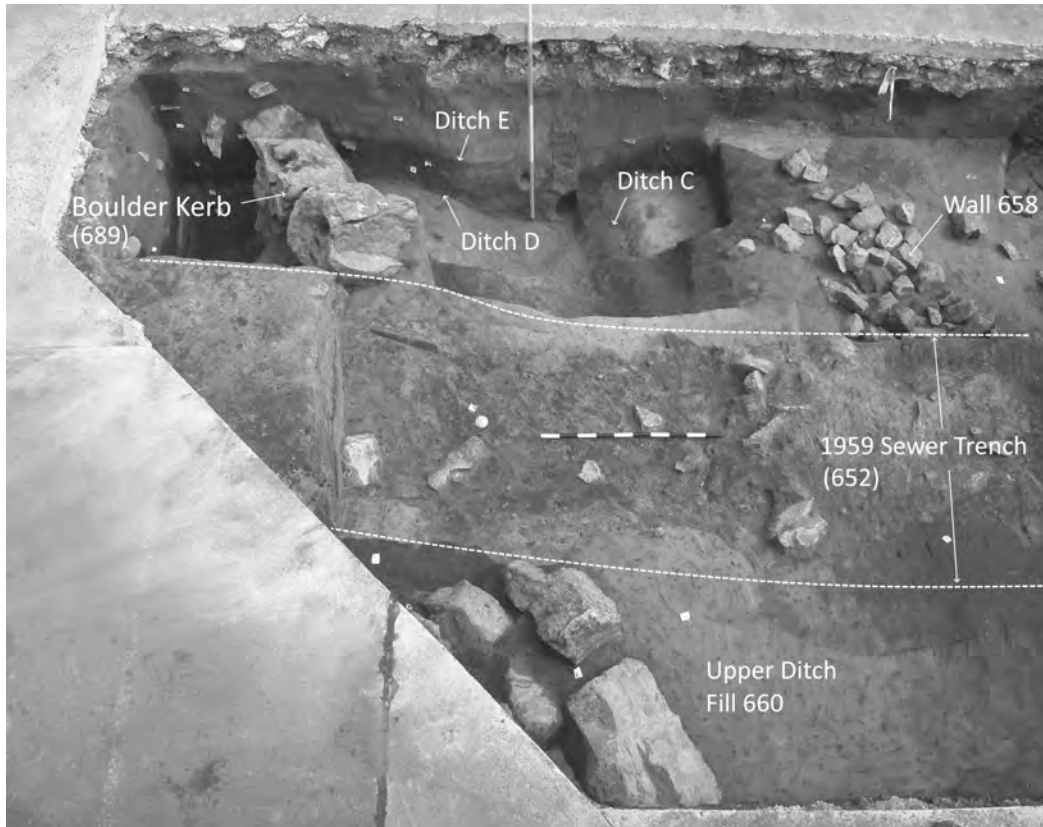


Fig. 10 Detail of cutting excavated through Ditches C, D and E showing Kerb 689 and modern (1959) sewer trench. Scale 1m

medieval Ditch F and the line of the 20th century sewer trench although a remnant of rubble (719) indicated that the two walls may originally have been connected. No evidence was preserved to indicate whether Wall 658 originally extended further to either the NE of SW and the original function of this short stretch of masonry was not evident.

The building was positioned immediately to the south of a large boundary ditch aligned SW to NE that had been recut on at least three occasions (Figs 10 and 11, Ditches C, D and E), which extended beyond the excavation area in both directions. The building plot appeared to have been further demarcated to the SW by a further short stretch of ditch, Ditch B (Fig. 8, F698), which appeared to join with Ditches C, D and E and define a boundary immediately to the west of the building. Unfortunately, this interpretation was not established with any certainty as the ditch was largely destroyed by a modern sewer trench (652), part of the new sewer line observed by

Sergeant Rodgers in 1959. The boundary on the north side of the building, first defined by Ditch C (688) was subsequently recut on at least two occasions by Ditches D and E (Figs 10 and 11). The latest boundary (Ditch D) also incorporated an outer kerb formed of large limestone boulders (Fig. 10, feature 689), which were closely spaced at intervals along the shoulder of the ditch. It seems likely that it was these kerb boulders that Sergeant Rodgers mistakenly interpreted to reflect the remains of a building in the 1959 sewer inspection pit. The purpose of the kerb of boulders remains uncertain although they may have been placed to act as the foundation of an earth or sand bank located outside the ditch. Alternatively, they may have formed a rudimentary barrier designed to restrict tidal water entering the ditch, an event that marine molluscs recovered from the ditch sequence (see Law, below) indicate occurred periodically and perhaps daily.

A crouched inhumation burial (Sk1, Figs 12 and

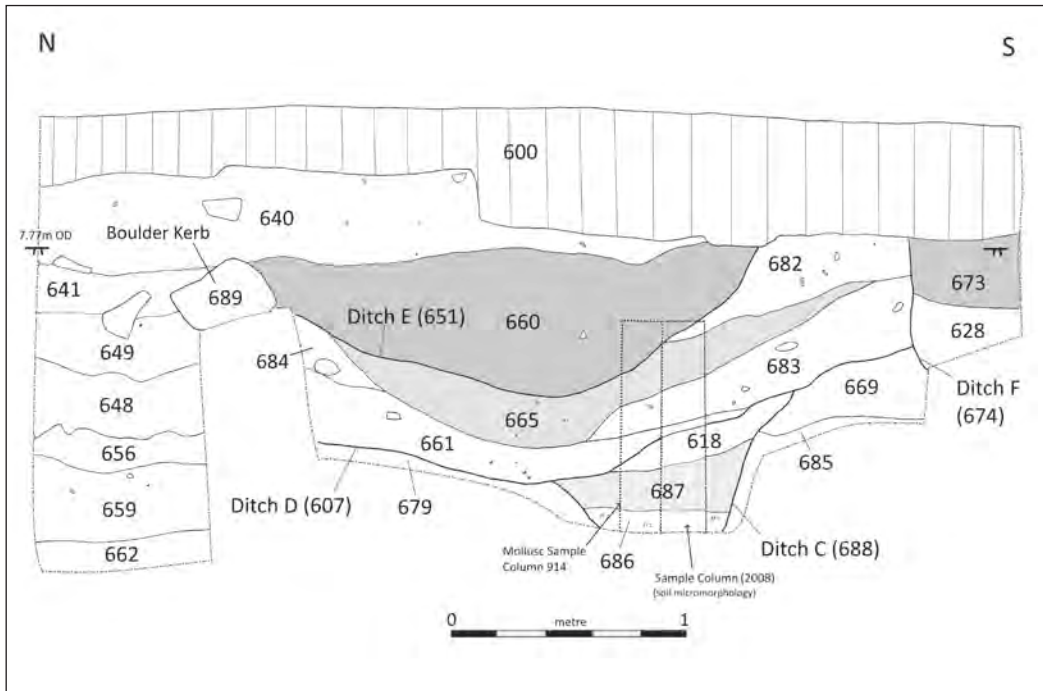


Fig. 11 West-facing section through Roman boundary Ditches C, D and E. Scale shown

13) was interred in a very shallow irregular scoop in deposit 632, immediately adjacent to the southern shoulder of Ditch E, the latest in the sequence of ditches that bounded the building on the north side. The burial was aligned SW to NE and both the burial and the latest ditch fill (660) were sealed by a thick layer of culturally sterile windblown sand (Fig. 11, deposit 640). The preliminary osteological assessment of the human remains (see Holst, below) indicated that the individual suffered from a wide variety of serious conditions prior to death (see Holst, below).

This final phase of Roman occupation on the site appears to have been relatively short-lived, as indicated by a group of stratified coins recovered from remnant floor deposits (702, 705 and 758) inside Building A and the primary fill of Ditch D, all of which date to the period 320-50 AD (see Gurney, below). Deposits overlying the remains of the building produced a single sherd from a decorated Oxfordshire colour-coated ware bowl dating to the late 4th century (see Timby, below).

The excavation exercise as a whole produced a limited assemblage of finds and some deposits, in particular the earlier activity (*Phases I.1-I.3*) and the

latest fill of boundary Ditch E (*Phase I.4*), yielded no definitive dating evidence. In order to clarify this uncertain site chronology samples were taken from culturally sterile sand deposits pre and post-dating the Roman activity for Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL) dating, the preferred method for dating inorganic mineral sands. The OSL samples were taken by specialist Dr Philip Toms from the Geochronology Laboratories at the University of Gloucestershire as a means to clarify the start and end of the Roman activity on the site. This chronology was to be further improved by AMS radiocarbon determinations for the skeleton (SK1) and for animal bone retrieved from the earliest sand deposits (*Phase I.1*, layer 631). Neither the OSL or AMS analyses were undertaken.

Period II: Post-Roman to post-medieval (5th -17th centuries)

No discernible evidence of structural activity on the site between the late Roman and modern periods was observed, however a small collection of residual medieval and post-medieval artefacts was retrieved.



Fig. 12 Inhumation burial SK1 as excavated.
Scales 500mm

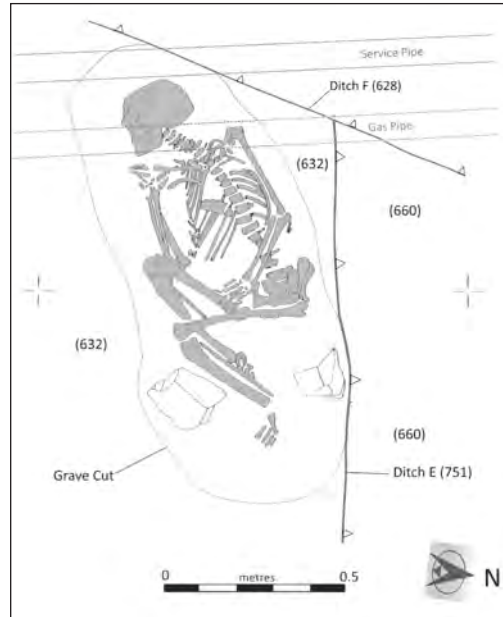


Fig. 13 Plan of Skeleton SK1 as excavated.
Scale shown

Phase II.1

After the abandonment of the Roman settlement, provisionally during the mid to late 4th century, the site entered a prolonged period of diminished activity. Ditch E (Phase I.4), the latest boundary ditch, was filled with an accumulation of culturally sterile windblown sand that was in turn overlain by a deposit of homogeneous sandy soil (612, 640 and 703 etc) that, despite intensive modern development, sealed the Roman archaeology to a depth of some 500mm in places. Although no clear differentiation in these post Roman deposits was evident, the small collection of late Roman, medieval and post-medieval pottery sherds retrieved from them, perhaps derived from manuring, suggested the deposit is likely to have been exploited for agriculture during the post medieval period.

Period III: Modern (18th-21st centuries)

Modern activity over the site can be broadly subdivided into two phases of activity.

Phase III.1

A boundary or drainage ditch (Fig. 8, Ditch F) of

U-shaped profile and up to 700 mm deep was dug during the 18th century in a north-east to south-west orientation. The ditch cut Roman and Period II deposits and structures.

Phase III.2

The building designed by Hans Price for the School of Science and Art was erected in 1893 to the immediate east of the excavation area and two small extensions on the west side, since demolished (F622 and F615), were constructed during the 20th century. A series of associated services that crossed the site were also laid at varying times during the same period (F605, F609 and F652), as well as both gas and electricity services laid directly over the Roman inhumation burial (Fig. 12, above).

FINDS SUMMARY

Note – the following digest reports are drawn from detailed assessment reports produced by the named specialists below that are available in the project archive.

Pottery

Jane Timby

The excavation exercise yielded a total of 1,050 pottery sherds, the majority of which, some 908 sherds, date to the later Roman period. This assemblage largely consists of local greywares dating to the 3rd and 4th centuries, with a few residual 2nd-century imported Samian sherds. Regional products include a fragment of Oxfordshire colour-coated bowl decorated with stamped rosettes typical of the later 4th century. A restricted range of utilitarian vessels is represented, mainly jars and to a lesser degree, bowls.

The remainder of the pottery assemblage consists of small collections of medieval pottery, some 77 sherds, and a similar quantity of modern wares (65 sherds). A range of medieval wares dating to the 13th to 15th centuries were identified, the poor condition of the heavily abraded sherds suggesting this pottery originated from elsewhere, whilst the modern assemblage comprised the expected range of types for an urban site.

Animal Bone

Lorrain Higbee

A total of 734 fragments of animal bone were recovered by hand from the excavation area and preceding evaluation trench (Avon Archaeology 2008). The bulk of the assemblage (c. 70%) was recovered from Roman contexts, a further 24% from the broadly dated post-Roman to post-medieval soil accumulation that sealed the Roman activity and the remainder from post-medieval and modern contexts. Bone preservation was either good or fair, with six species identified, including livestock such as cattle and sheep/goat and wildlife species such as field vole and blackbird.

Sheep/goat are the most common livestock species in Roman contexts, a few bones are from neonatal animals suggesting on-site breeding. Cattle are the second most numerous group and then pig, whilst other identified species include dog, field vole, common frog and a member of the blackbird family. Cattle bones were dominant in the deep post-Roman soil accumulation with decreasing numbers of sheep/goat, horse and pig bones also retrieved. Modern deposits yielded only a very few sheep/goat and pig bones.

Human Remains

Malin Holst

Osteological analysis of the crouched inhumation buried alongside the Roman boundary ditch indicates

the well-preserved skeleton of a male aged 36-45 years old of gracile build, smaller in stature than the Roman average (Holst 2010).

The skeleton showed evidence for a wide range of diseases and pathological conditions, some rarely observed in archaeological skeletons. These included congenital anomalies relating to early foetal development including an additional vertebra and additional ribs. Evidence for several periods of growth cessation as a result of undernourishment or illness during the first few years of childhood was also observed and spinal lesions indicated back strain in adulthood, probably from carrying heavy loads. Evidence for further illness in later adulthood included possible gall stones, chronic sinusitis, dental decay, severe pus-releasing dental abscesses, periodontal disease, widespread plaque concretions, mild degeneration of the spinal and hips joints and osteoarthritis in the joint between a right wrist bone and the thumb. There was also evidence for healing inflammation of the shins and widespread localised bony reactions that were active at the time of death, possibly due to ulcers, haemorrhaging or other causes. Finally, destructive lesions on the right shoulder and in the lower spine possibly were caused by brucellosis or tuberculosis.

Two further disarticulated human bones were also recovered from other excavated deposits indicating the presence of further human burials in the vicinity of the site.

In view of the results of the osteological assessment, a sample of bone was submitted for inclusion in a research project designed to study and define aDNA markers for tuberculosis in ancient human remains (Müller *et al.* 2016). Further to the range of health conditions suffered by the male inhumation a further sample of bone from the skeleton will be submitted for inclusion in the ancient human aDNA research project '*A Thousand Ancient Genomes*' (Skoglund forthcoming) led by Dr Tom Booth at the Pontus Skoglund Laboratory, The Francis Crick Institute, London.

Plant Macrofossils

Lisa Gray

Twenty bulk environmental samples taken from deposits filling Roman features were assessed for plant macrofossils, with cereal chaff, grains, seeds and charcoal present in varying quantities, predominantly as charred remains. The preservation is moderate to good with the potential for useful identifications to species to be made. Whilst the charred remains appear to represent the deposition, from an unknown source, of waste from the final

stage of crop processing, further identification will provide a definite record of contemporary cultivated species. The excavation at the college site produced the first definite evidence of Roman occupation in the centre of Weston-super-Mare close to the seafront and although interpretation of the plant macrofossils will be limited, full identification to species will provide an important dataset for future comparison with other similarly dated sites in the town.

Molluscs

Matt Law

A well-preserved assemblage of molluscs was collected by hand, from bulk soil samples and from two sample columns subdivided into 100mm spits. Marine limpets make up the majority of specimens in both the hand collected and bulk sample assemblages. The size range of species represented possibly reflect a bias during retrieval towards larger specimens, but their presence in the samples suggests limpets were exploited as a foodstuff collected from a variety of coastal locations. Mollusc species recovered from a column taken through a sequence of sand deposits in the south-east of the site reveal the basal deposits comprised estuarine sands, whilst the upper sand sequence consisted of drier ground intermittently flooded with seawater. Intertidal mollusc species and barnacle plates were recovered from the second column, which sampled the fills of a series of intercutting ditches that defined the northern boundary of the site suggesting the ditches were flooded on a daily basis as they lay open.

Coins

Ron J. Gurney

A small collection of eight coins provisionally dated to the period AD 320-50 was retrieved from late phase Roman features and deposits during the excavation exercise, which suggest the occupation of Building A was relatively short-lived.

Coins noted as 'barbarous' refers to coins not struck at official mints, but contemporary forgeries. Often legends are blundered, although the portraiture is sometimes almost as good as officially struck coinage. Invariably the coin is struck on a smaller flan.

Catalogue

Refs cited are to: R.I.C. VIII (Kent 1981); Cohen 1880-92; Sear 1988

Coin no. 1 SF805 (Ditch D - Context 661)

Denomination: Nummus

Metal: Copper alloy

Weight: 2.4g

Obverse detail: Laureate head of Crispus as Caesar, facing left

Obverse legend: CRISPVS NOB CAES

Reverse detail: Altar inscribed VOTIS XX

Reverse legend: BEATA TRANQVILLITAS

Date: AD 317-26

Die orientation: 180 degrees

Mint: PTR Treveri (Trier, Germany)

Refs: R.I.C. 166, Cohen 5, Sear 3915

Coin no. 2 SF809 (Context 676)

Denomination: Nummus*

Metal: Copper alloy

Weight: 0.6g

Obverse detail: Laureate head of Constantine II as Caesar, facing right

Obverse legend: CONSTANTINVS? NOB C

Reverse detail: Two soldiers standing either side of two standards

Reverse legend: GLORIA EXERCITVS

Date: AD 317-37

Die orientation: 180 degrees

Mint: Uncertain

Refs: see R.I.C. 328, Cohen 122, Sear 3951

**Probably barbarous; on a small flan*

Coin no. 3 SF813 (Context 676)

Denomination: Nummus*

Metal: Copper alloy

Weight: 0.7g

Obverse detail: Diademed head of a later Constantine dynasty Emperor facing right

Obverse legend: Off flan and blundered

Reverse detail: Victory advancing right

Reverse legend: Off flan and blundered

Date: Mid-4th century AD

Die orientation: 180 degrees

Mint: Uncertain

Refs: None

**Almost certainly barbarous; on a small flan*

Coin no. 4 SF814 (Context 676)

Denomination: Nummus
Metal: Copper alloy
Weight: 1.4g
Obverse detail: Helmeted head of Constantinopolis facing left
Obverse legend: Legend blundered. Should read CONSTANTINOPOLIS
Reverse detail: Victory standing with foot on prow, holding sceptre and leaning on shield
Reverse legend: No legend
Date: AD 330-46
Die orientation: 180 degrees
Mint: Uncertain
Refs: R.I.C. 548, Cohen 21, Sear 3890
**Probably barbarous*

Coin no. 5 SF815 (Context 676)

Denomination: Nummus
Metal: Copper alloy
Weight: 0.8g
Obverse detail: Diademed head of mid-4th century Emperor facing right
Obverse legend: Blundered legend
Reverse detail: Two soldiers standing either side of two standards
Reverse legend: GLORIA EXERCITVS, but blundered
Date: c. AD 350
Die orientation: 180 degrees
Mint: Uncertain
**Almost certainly barbarous*

Coin no. 6 SF827 (Context 694)

Denomination: Nummus
Metal: Copper alloy
Weight: 1.3g
Obverse detail: Diademed head of Constantius II, as Augustus, facing right
Obverse legend: CONSTANTIVS P F AVG
Reverse detail: Two Victories facing each other
Reverse legend: VICTORIAE DD AVG Q NN
Date: AD 337-361
Die orientation: 180 degrees
Mint: Uncertain

Coin no. 7 SF829 (Context 694)

Denomination: Nummus
Metal: Copper alloy
Weight: 1.1g
Obverse detail: Diademed head of Constantine II as Caesar, facing right
Obverse legend: CONSTANTINVS (I). NOB. C.
Reverse detail: Two Soldiers standing either side of two standards
Reverse legend: GLORIA EXERCITVS
Date: AD 317-37
Die orientation: 230 degrees
Mint: SIS Siscia (Sisak, Croatia)
Refs: R.I.C. 328, Cohen 122, Sear as 3951, but with SIS mintmark

Coin no. 8 SF850 (Context 702)

Denomination: Nummus
Metal: Copper alloy
Weight: 1.3g
Obverse detail: Helmeted head of Constantinopolis facing left
Obverse legend: CONSTANTINOPOLIS
Reverse detail: Victory standing with foot on prow, holding sceptre and leaning on shield
Reverse legend: None
Date: AD 330-46
Die orientation: 200 degrees
Mint: PLG Lugdunum (Lyon, France)
Refs: R.I.C. 548, Cohen 21, Sear 3890

Clay Tobacco Pipe

Sarah Newns

A very small collection of clay tobacco pipe fragments was recovered from deposits post-dating the Roman activity.

The collection includes a single marked tobacco pipe bowl (Fig. 14) recovered from the fill (673) of Ditch F. The base cartouche is marked 'Wil/ (C) HAM/PEN' and is by maker William Champion I who was baptised in Shepton Mallet in 1670-71 and married before 1699. Similar pipes found in the Shepton Mallet area stamped 'WILL CHAMPEN' are dated c. 1690-1700 by Price (2013) and 1680-1728 by Lewcun (2007).



Fig. 14 Clay tobacco pipe bowl of c. 1700 by Somerset maker William Champion I

Metalwork

The metalwork assemblage consisted of 65 objects in total, eight of which were copper-alloy coins (Gurney, above). A further three copper-alloy objects, possibly buckles/belt fittings, were also recovered. The remainder of the assemblage comprised iron objects; 33 nails, eleven hobnails, one pin, one rivet with ceramic attached used to repair a broken pot and eight heavily corroded unidentified objects. The assemblage was submitted for assessment to specialist Adam Murray in May 2010, after having been x-rayed by Wiltshire Conservation Service.

After a preliminary scan of the assemblage in June 2010 Mr Murray identified two possible military objects, a Roman military belt fitting and a possible piece of armour (*lorica segmentata*).

It is deeply regrettable that subsequently and despite repeated efforts, including two visits to his home address, no further communication of any kind was forthcoming from Mr Murray and no specialist assessment report was ever provided. His whereabouts have never been traced and, moreover, the objects have never been returned.

In view of these circumstances the preliminary identifications suggested by Mr Murray must be treated with great caution.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The evidence recorded during the project confirms Roman settlement activity on the Hans Price site during the first half of the 4th century AD, although the origins of that activity and its precise character

remain uncertain. Certainly, the 2nd-century disc brooch recovered on the site by Rodgers in 1972, coupled with coins of 1st- and 2nd-century AD date recovered during the development of nearby Royal Crescent (SMR 127) indicate a somewhat earlier foundation of Roman settlement activity in the wider area. Moreover, observations made by Rodgers elsewhere on the College site and at Nos 2-10 South Terrace identified the likely remains of a timber building with a wooden floor that was subsequently replaced by a stone building with a wooden drain. In combination, these discoveries point to an extended area of Roman settlement-related activity that incorporated the site of the School of Science and Art and very likely included more than the single building recorded during the 2009 excavation.

The coin evidence suggests the occupation of the site ended soon after the middle of the 4th century AD. If so, this is consistent with a wider later Roman landscape scenario in North Somerset proposed by Stephen Rippon (2006) who points to 4th-century marine incursions across the North Somerset Levels and the gradual abandonment or disruption of man-made or natural sea defences, an event that coincides with significantly reduced evidence for Roman settlement activity across the Levels generally and the abandonment of low status saltmarsh sites by c. AD 350. This scenario of landscape change is independently supported by increased oak regeneration pollen core data from marginal wetland sites (*ibid.*).

Evidence for the economy and status of the settlement at the site of the School of Science and Art is limited but, overall, points to a relatively modest status settlement whose economy was based upon a mixed agricultural base that included livestock, principally sheep/goat and cattle, cultivated cereals and the utilisation of marine and saltmarsh resources, in particular limpets. Nonetheless, despite its seemingly modest status the residents were clearly connected to the wider Roman economy, as indicated by the presence of coins minted at Trier (Germany), Lyon (Gaul) and Sisak (Croatia), all of which circulated widely in contemporary Britain and Europe (R. Webley pers. comm.). Moreover, the occupants may have been of sufficient standing to have had at least one slave or chattel (Edmondson 2011) – a possibility suggested by the range and myriad nature of health conditions suffered by the male who was buried in a shallow grave just outside the building.

The location and organisation of the later (Phase 1.4) Roman activity on the site provides some insight concerning its setting and the wider palaeogeography of the study area in the mid-4th century AD. The presence of the substantial and recut

boundary ditch (Ditches C-E) immediately to the north of the building, which was either reinforced or complimented by an outer kerb of boulders is considered significant. The ditch fills produced marine molluscs that are indicative of frequent and possibly daily tidal incursions (Law, above) and, thereby, that the building was situated fairly close to or indeed directly alongside the southern bank of a tidal inlet, creek or watercourse, that extended inland to the east at the foot of Worlebury. This scenario is consistent with the location and general route of 'Weston's Lost River', a tidal breach in the coastal belt of sand dunes postulated by Chris Richards and accepted by Stephen Rippon (2006, 10). If so, the Hans Price site would have been particularly vulnerable to episodic marine incursions and/or gradually rising sea levels during the later Roman period (Lamb 1995). However, if marine inundation of some kind ultimately caused the site to be abandoned, the remains of the Roman building were overlain by further accumulations of windblown sand as opposed to any significant accumulation of wholly marine alluvium.

In combination, the archaeological, topographic and documentary evidence supports the presence of a former tidal inlet or watercourse that locally once extended inland from Knightstone and followed the general route of modern South Terrace at least as far east as Grove Place. Land on the south side of the inlet, which included the Hans Price site and a coastal belt of windblown sands that today underlie parts of the modern town and seafront, whilst separated from the southern flank of Worlebury Hill, was settled and farmed by the early to mid-4th century and probably from a significantly earlier date. This palaeogeography is consistent with the distribution of Wentlooge Series soils (Findlay 1965) developed on estuarine clay, which occupy a narrow neck of ground between the end of a coastal strip of windblown sands and the foot of Worlebury hillslope. In addition, the Environment Agency's Flood Risk mapping (<https://flood-map-for-planning.service.gov.uk>) depicts a well-defined high risk and meandering flood zone that corresponds with this postulated marine inlet.

The evidence recovered from the School of Science and Art site, whilst incomplete due to a lack of funding, represents the some of the first evidence for Roman settlement related activity in Weston that has been investigated in detail and to modern standards: it provides an important contribution towards a greater understanding of the chronology and character of Roman activity in the town, which at present remains very limited (Russett 2021). Future opportunities to investigate and define the corridor of the suggested former tidal inlet, perhaps through a review of existing development-related geotechnical data, and thereby

identify further sites of Roman activity that almost certainly remain to be discovered in the Knightstone area, represents an important future research priority for the town with considerable potential, not least for the recovery of waterlogged paleoenvironmental and archaeological evidence for the late prehistoric and Roman periods.

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All errors above remain the responsibility of the author.

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1806 (Weston); 1815 (enclosure); 1827 (land exchanges for new road); 1838 (tithe); 1853 (Weston); 1862 (main Weston sewers); 1865 (Weston); 1884 (1st edn OS); 1884 (Tithe 'redemption' plans*); 1889 (Plan of sale of glebe lands for development); 1902 (2nd edn OS); 1929 (3rd edn OS)
- *Note: the provenance of these plans is unclear – they come some 40 years after the 'normal' tithe survey, but the library does not appear to hold any reference book for them. At present they are probably best seen as relating to a reassessment of tithe liabilities during the subdivision of the original, ancient parish of Weston, into a series of new parishes, based around new churches, as the population of Weston expanded rapidly in the second half of the 19th century.*
- Photocopy of clipping from Weston Mercury, April 1959, with story of tech. College excavations (transcribed).
- Weston Museum, in the archive file of Sgt Rodgers's excavation
- Reports of burial finds from 19th century newspapers; correspondence between G. Rye, Borough Librarian, and site contractors, 1959; Sketch plan of site location, undated and unprovenanced; summary of contexts; numerous context 'sheets', not to modern standards; handwritten and typescript notes by G Rye and others relating to site
- Other museum records
- OS record cards relating to technical college and other sites; and-drawn map, 1885, by E.Y. Poole showing locations of archaeological finds (in separate 'Poole' file)
- Other sources:
Chris Richards, Weston's Lost River, unpublished typescript
Weston-super-Mare Extensive Urban Survey, maps and typescript
HER 500m trawl around the site, North Somerset Archaeological Service
Map and schedule of Brockley Manor estates, 1768, including Weston, in private hands.