



Blake Road, Cirencester Gloucestershire

Archaeological Watching Brief



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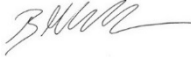
Client name Cappagh Contractors Construction Ltd
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Clearwater Court
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Site location Blake Road, Cirencester
County Gloucestershire
National grid reference (NGR) 402348, 202458
Statutory designations Scheduled Monument: Corinium Roman town (NHLE 1003426)
Planning authority Cotswold District Council
Museum name Corinium Museum
Museum accession code TBC
OASIS Id wessexar1-508474

WA project name Blake Road, Cirencester
WA project code 258201
Dates of fieldwork 04/07/2022 - 15/07/2022
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Quality Assurance

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Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Thames Water Utilities Ltd ('the client') to undertake an archaeological monitoring of excavations for the insertion of a flap valve into the existing sewage system. The works monitored were centred on NGR 402348, 202458, to the rear of Blake Road, Cirencester.

The area of work was situated towards the northern extent of the Scheduled Monument for Corinium Roman town (NHLE **1003426**), which covers much of the footprint of Corinium, Cirencester's Roman predecessor.

The excavation consisted of a 2.5 x 2.5 m pit which reached a depth of 2.2 m below the present ground level. Within the excavation tarmac, made ground and modern backfill deposits were recorded. No archaeological features or deposits were observed as the excavation was wholly within the footprint of groundworks associated with the extant sewer and services.

Acknowledgements

Wessex Archaeology would like to thank Cappagh Contractors Construction Ltd and Thames Water Utilities Ltd, for commissioning the archaeological watching brief, in particular Melvin Hicks and Dr Victoria Reeve. Wessex Archaeology is also grateful for the advice of Daniel Bashford, Assistant Inspector of Ancient Monuments, who monitored the project for Historic England.

Blake Road, Cirencester - Monitoring

Archaeological Watching Brief

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project and planning background

- 1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Thames Water Utilities Ltd, to undertake an archaeological watching brief during excavations for the insertion of a flap valve into the existing sewage system. The monitored works covered a pit of 2.5 x 2.5 m for the installation of a flap valve, centred on NGR 402348, 202458, at the rear of Blake Road, Cirencester, GL7 2EQ.
- 1.1.2 The proposed development consists of the mechanical excavation of a pit of up to 2.5 x 2.5 m in order to facilitate the insertion of a flap valve. The ground into which the pit was excavated consisted largely of disturbed ground from the main sewer construction. The manhole cover is marked 1969, suggesting that this branch of the system was constructed to support the adjacent housing (V Reeve, *pers. com*).
- 1.1.3 The watching brief was carried out as a condition of planning permission, granted by Historic England, as part of a programme of archaeological works, and carried out with Scheduled Monument consent.
- 1.1.4 The watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a written scheme of investigation (WSI) which detailed the aims, methodologies and standards to be employed (Wessex Archaeology 2022). Historic England approved the WSI prior to fieldwork commencing.
- 1.1.5 The watching brief was undertaken between 04/07/2022 and 15/07/2022.

1.2 Scope of the report

- 1.2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the results of the watching brief, to interpret the results within their local and regional context, and to assess their potential to address the aims outlined in the WSI, thereby making available information about the archaeological resource (a preservation by record).

1.3 Location, topography and geology

- 1.3.1 The watching brief was located to the north-east of Blake Road and to the south-west of Hereward Road, approximately 450 m north of Cirencester Town Centre. The Site is at the entrance of an unnamed lane which runs south to Abbey Grounds Park.
- 1.3.2 The Site was situated within the Scheduled Monument called the Corinium Roman town (NHLE **1003426**), which covers much of the footprint of Corinium, Cirencester's Roman predecessor. It is in the far north of the monument, 6 m south of the monument's northern boundary (**Fig. 1**).
- 1.3.3 The underlying bedrock geology throughout the Site is mapped as the Forest Marble Formation, a type of silicate-mudstone, overlain by alluvium deposits, suggesting the presence of historic rivers (British Geological Survey, *Geology of Britain Viewer*). Alluvium

deposits encountered during excavations in close vicinity to the Site have comprised largely of sand and silty clay (Gloucestershire Historic Environment Record (GHER) **33929, 39161, 48797**).

- 1.3.4 The current ground level is recorded at 113 m aOD on relatively flat ground. Where the natural substrate has been encountered during archaeological investigations, it was recorded at 1 m below current ground level (Cotswold Archaeology 2009).

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 The archaeological and historical background was assessed as part of the Archaeological Impact and Mitigation Statement (Wessex Archaeology 2022), which considered the recorded historic environment resource within a 500 m study area of the development. A summary of the results is presented below, with relevant entry numbers from the Gloucestershire Historic Environment Record (GHER) and the National Heritage List for England (NHLE) included. The location of nearby heritage assets is illustrated in **Figure 1**. Additional sources of information are referenced, as appropriate.

2.2 Previous investigations related to the development

- 2.2.1 The GHER contains entries pertaining to 29 archaeological investigations within 100 m of the Site, which includes 11 intrusive evaluations and seven watching briefs.
- 2.2.2 The most relevant to the Site was a watching brief that was undertaken to observe groundworks by British Gas in 1991, just 2.2 m to the south-east of the Site (GHER **16324**). Shallow service trenches were excavated into modern hardcore, and no archaeological artefacts or deposits were encountered. A further watching brief was undertaken 22 m to the south-east of the Site during groundworks for a new path, but the no archaeological remains were encountered.

2.3 Archaeological and historical context

Romano-British (AD 43 - 410)

- 2.3.1 The Site is located within a Scheduled Monument that designates the Roman town of *Corinium Dobunorum* (NHLE 1003426). The settlement is thought to have originated from an auxiliary fort that was established shortly before 50 AD, which then became a *vicus*, or small town. The population grew exponentially, and by the second century had become the second largest town in Britain, surpassed only by *Londinium*. It was an important administrative centre, acting as *civitas* to the native Dobunni people.
- 2.3.2 The Site lies 27 m north-west of the of the northernmost corner of the walled town, and there is no expectation that any earthworks associated with the town defences would have extended into it. Although outside of the core *vicus*, it is a distinct possibility that the Site is located in an area of extramural settlement. Extensive excavations undertaken in 1965 noted that the Romano-British deposits usually lay approximately 0.6 m below the current ground level.

Medieval (AD 410-1500)

- 2.3.3 An abbey complex, dating to the 12th century at the latest, was located to the immediate north-east of the Site, outside of the Spital Gate, 20 m away (NHLE **1187492**; GHER **30186, 417**).



- 2.3.4 Several structures associated with the abbey lay close by to the Site. Spital Gate Farm was the home grange of the abbey, which documentary sources state was still standing in 1803 but had been demolished by 1887. From mapping of the period, it appears it stood to the east of the Spital Gate, 39 m to the north-east of the Site (GHER **641**).
- 2.3.5 Eight metres to the west of the Spital Gate, and 12 m north east of the Site, are the foundation trenches of a medieval or post-medieval wall, which runs parallel to the present course of the river Churn (GHER **39164**). The full extent of the wall was not identified. Between Spital Gate and the wall foundations was an area of metalled surface, constructed of limestone and gravel and thought to date to the 13th century. Amongst the metalled surface was some 14th century pottery (GHER **39163**). The above features were first encountered between 0.4 and 0.5 m below the ground surface. These, and other associated finds within the study area, indicate that the abbey grounds ran along and up to the present-day Blake Road.
- 2.3.6 Additionally, a holloway ('the old course of the White Way' GHER **9820**) is projected to run within 10 m of the north of the Site. The width of the way itself is between 8-10 m, and a lack of confirmed excavated sections at this point suggest a possibility the course could deviate closer to Site.

Post-Medieval (AD 1500 – 1800)

- 2.3.7 A well was recorded to be in the general area of the Site in 1891, though the source of the exact location is unknown (GHER **28771**, **28772**). It was 8 m deep, permeating through made ground and gravels and into clay below.
- 2.3.8 In Rudder's historical account of Cirencester (1800), it states that a mortar-piece and brass saker were found 'within 150 paces of Spital-Gate', though it does not specify in which direction (GHER **28569**).
- 2.3.9 There was once a watercourse of the river Churn that was said to run alongside Gloucester Street, which was then backfilled in the 1780s (GHER **28517**). It appears the GHER has plotted this record along the present-day route of the Churn, which is further north than the discussed watercourse.

Modern (AD 1800-Present)

- 2.3.10 On a town plan from 1879-1880, the Site is shown to be plant nursery. On the opposite side of the river Churn was a withy bed plantation, 15 m to the north of Site.
- 2.3.11 The housing development of Hereward Road and Blake Road was not visible on a 1960 Ordnance Survey map, suggesting it had not been built by this time. By the publication of the next Ordnance Survey map in 1972, the roads and housing had appeared, suggesting the Site was developed within this period. Any archaeological deposits would likely have been truncated by the excavation of service trenches and the foundations of houses, and where any landscaping occurred. It is known that the majority of the Site has already been disturbed to the depth of sewer, during the construction of the current sewer chamber.

3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

3.1 Aims

- 3.1.1 The aims of the watching brief, as stated in the WSI (Wessex Archaeology 2022) and as defined in the ClfA *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (ClfA 2014a), were to:



- allow, within the resources available, the preservation by record of archaeological deposits, the presence and nature of which could not be established (or established with sufficient accuracy) in advance of the development or other works;
- provide an opportunity, if needed, for the watching archaeologist to signal to all interested parties, before the destruction of the material in question, that an archaeological find has been made for which the resources allocated to the watching brief itself are not sufficient to support treatment to a satisfactory and proper standard; and
- guide, not replace, any requirement for contingent excavation or preservation of possible deposits.

3.2 Objectives

3.2.1 In order to achieve the above aims, the objectives of the watching brief, also defined in the WSI (Wessex Archaeology 2022), were to:

- determine the presence or absence of archaeological features, deposits, structures, artefacts or ecofacts within the specified works area;
- record and establish, within the constraints of the works, the extent, character, date, condition and quality of any surviving archaeological remains (a preservation by record);
- place any identified archaeological remains within a wider historical and archaeological context in order to assess their significance; and
- make available information about the archaeological resource on the site by preparing a report on the results of the watching brief.

3.3 Further site-specific research questions were identified in the Archaeological Impact and Mitigation Statement (Wessex Archaeology 2022):

- To what extent has the course of the River Churn been impacted by the development of the Roman town (Corinium) and the early medieval to medieval monastic landscape of Cirencester Abbey?
- Is there potential for the outer earthworks of the Roman northern town walls to have included the Site and if so, what does this tell us about the extent of these earthworks?
- Is there evidence to confirm the presence of a former monastic barn within the Site?
- To what extent have previous disturbances (including for the late post-medieval well and the 1980s sewer cuts [now believed to date from the 1960s]) affected the potential for archaeological remains within the footprint of the proposed works?

4 METHODS

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 All works were undertaken in accordance with the detailed methodology set out within the WSI (Wessex Archaeology 2022) and in general compliance with the standards outlined in



CIfA guidance (CIfA 2014a). Any significant variations to the methodology were agreed in writing with Historic England and the client prior to being implemented. The methods employed are summarised below.

4.2 Fieldwork methods

General

4.3 Introduction

4.3.1 Health and safety override archaeological considerations in all works since, as stated in CIfA guidance, Health and Safety regulations and requirements cannot be ignored no matter how imperative the need to record archaeological information; hence Health and Safety took priority over archaeological matters (CIfA 2014a, 10).

4.3.2 The works monitored the excavation of a pit, up to 2.5 x 2.5 m for the installation of a flap valve between 04/07/2022 and 15/07/2022. Once a depth of 1.2 m was reached, excavation halted while a frame and shoring were inserted before further excavation continued.

4.3.3 The watching archaeologist monitored all mechanical excavations within the specified area.

4.3.4 Spoil from machine stripping was visually scanned for the purposes of finds retrieval.

Recording

4.3.5 A full photographic record was made using digital cameras equipped with an image sensor of not less than 10 megapixels. Digital images have been subject to managed quality control and curation processes, which has embedded appropriate metadata within the image and will ensure long term accessibility of the image set.

4.3.6 No drawings or GPS recording were required during the watching brief because the work set out was as planned.

4.4 Finds and environmental strategies

4.4.1 No artefacts or environmental samples were recovered during the watching brief.

4.5 Monitoring

4.5.1 The Assistant Inspector of Ancient Monuments monitored the watching brief on behalf of Historic England. Any variations to the WSI, if required to better address the project aims, were agreed in advance with the client and the Assistant Inspector of Ancient Monuments.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 No natural or archaeological deposits were identified during the excavation works. The excavation revealed modern backfill deposits and made ground levels.

5.2 Stratigraphic sequence

5.2.1 The earliest material encountered were deposits 104 and 105. 104 was a brown sand deposit containing bricks, stones and concrete located to the eastern edges of the pit, but also partially observed in the south-western edge. 105 was a yellowish sand heavily mixed with bricks and stones located to the western edges. Both interpreted as modern backfills related to the previous groundworks, they were revealed at a depth of 0.7 m below ground level (BGL). These deposits extended beyond formation the level of 2.2 m BGL.

- 5.2.2 Deposit 102 was a mid-whitish silty sand with coarse gravel. Interpreted as made ground or levelling deposit, it was revealed at a depth of 0.1 m BGL and continued to 0.7 m across the excavation, except along the north-eastern edge where it was truncated by 103.
- 5.2.3 Deposit 103 was a mid-pinkish red sand and roadstone gravel. Located to the north-eastern edge of the excavation, it was revealed at a depth of 0.1 m BGL and continued to 1.1 m BGL. It was interpreted as modern backfill associated with a gas service trench.
- 5.2.4 The latest deposit recorded was a modern tarmac surface (101).

5.3 Summary

- 5.3.1 No archaeological features or deposits were observed during the watching brief.

5.4 Discussion

- 5.4.1 The excavation for the flap valve installation lay within the Corinium Roman town. According to the WSI (Wessex Archaeology, 2022), Romano-British and medieval deposits could be expected at depths between 0.4-0.6 m. There was no trace of these or any other significant archaeological remains at the 2.2 m depth reached.
- 5.4.2 The heavily mixed backfills observed demonstrate that the excavation lay entirely within previously disturbed ground.

6 ARCHIVE STORAGE AND CURATION

6.1 Museum

- 6.1.1 The archive resulting from the watching brief is currently held at the offices of Wessex Archaeology in Bristol. Corinium Museum has agreed in principle to accept the archive on completion of the project. An accession number is not currently required by the museum.

6.2 Preparation of the archive

Physical archive

- 6.2.1 The physical archive, which includes paper registers, will be prepared following the standard conditions for the acceptance of excavated archaeological material by Corinium museum, and in general following nationally recommended guidelines (Brown 2011; ClfA 2014c; SMA 1995).

Digital archive

- 6.2.2 The digital archive generated by the project, which comprises born-digital data (e.g., site records, survey data, databases and spreadsheets, photographs and reports), will be deposited with a Trusted Digital Repository, in this instance the Archaeology Data Service (ADS), to ensure its long-term curation. Digital data will be prepared following ADS guidelines (ADS 2013 and online guidance) and accompanied by metadata.

6.3 Selection strategy

- 6.3.1 It is widely accepted that not all the records and materials (artefacts and ecofacts) collected or created during the course of an archaeological project require preservation in perpetuity. These records and materials will be subject to selection in order to establish what will be retained for long-term curation, with the aim of ensuring that all elements selected to be retained are appropriate to establish the significance of the project and support future



research, outreach, engagement, display and learning activities, i.e., the retained archive should fulfil the requirements of both future researchers and the receiving Museum.

- 6.3.2 The selection strategy, which details the project-specific selection process, is underpinned by national guidelines on selection and retention (Brown 2011, section 4) and generic selection policies (SMA 1993; Wessex Archaeology's internal selection policy) and follows ClfA's *Toolkit for Selecting Archaeological Archives*. It should be agreed by all stakeholders (Wessex Archaeology's internal specialists, external specialists, local authority, museum) and fully documented in the project archive.
- 6.3.3 Project-specific proposals for selection are presented below. These proposals are based on recommendations by Wessex Archaeology's internal specialists and will be updated in line with any further comment by other stakeholders (museum, local authority). The selection strategy will be fully documented in the project archive.
- 6.3.4 Any material not selected for retention may be used for teaching or reference collections by Wessex Archaeology.

Documentary records

- 6.3.5 Paper records comprise site registers (other pro-forma site records are digital) and reports (Written Scheme of Investigation, client report). All will be retained and deposited with the project archive.

Digital data

- 6.3.6 The digital data comprise site records (tablet-recorded on site) in spreadsheet format; survey data; photographs; reports. All will be deposited, although site photographs will be subject to selection to eliminate poor quality and duplicated images, and any others not considered directly relevant to the archaeology of the site.

6.4 Security copy

- 6.4.1 In line with current best practice (e.g., Brown 2011), on completion of the project a security copy of the written records will be prepared, in the form of a digital PDF/A file. PDF/A is an ISO-standardised version of the Portable Document Format (PDF) designed for the digital preservation of electronic documents through omission of features ill-suited to long-term archiving.

6.5 OASIS

- 6.5.1 An OASIS (online access to the index of archaeological investigations) record (<http://oasis.ac.uk>) has been initiated, with key fields completed (Appendix 1). A.pdf version of the final report will be submitted following approval by the Assistant Inspector of Ancient Monuments on behalf of the LPA. Subject to any contractual requirements on confidentiality, copies of the OASIS record will be integrated into the relevant local and national records and published through the Archaeology Data Service (ADS) ArchSearch catalogue.

7 COPYRIGHT

7.1 Archive and report copyright

- 7.1.1 The full copyright of the written/illustrative/digital archive relating to the project will be retained by Wessex Archaeology under the *Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988* with all rights reserved. The client will be licenced to use each report for the purposes that it was produced in relation to the project as described in the specification. The museum, however,



will be granted an exclusive licence for the use of the archive for educational purposes, including academic research, providing that such use conforms to the *Copyright and*

- 7.1.2 Information relating to the project will be deposited with the Historic Environment Record (HER) where it can be freely copied without reference to Wessex Archaeology for the purposes of archaeological research or development control within the planning process.

7.2 Third party data copyright

- 7.2.1 This document and the project archive may contain material that is non-Wessex Archaeology copyright (e.g., Ordnance Survey, British Geological Survey, Crown Copyright), or the intellectual property of third parties, which Wessex Archaeology are able to provide for limited reproduction under the terms of our own copyright licences, but for which copyright itself is non-transferable by Wessex Archaeology. Users remain bound by the conditions of the *Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988* with regard to multiple copying and electronic dissemination of such material.

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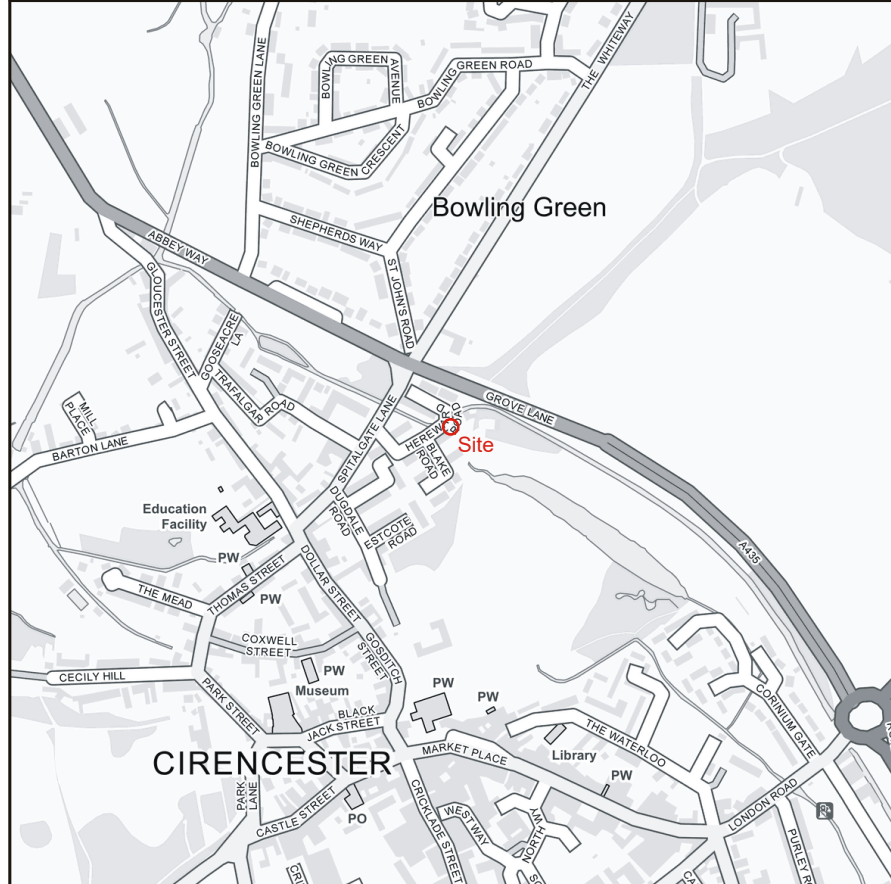
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Appendix 1 OASIS summary

Summary for wessexar1-508474

OASIS ID (UID)	wessexar1-508474
Project Name	Watching Brief at Blake Road, Cirencester, Gloucestershire
Sitename	Blake Road, Cirencester, Gloucestershire
Activity type	Watching Brief
Project Identifier(s)	258201
Planning Id	
Reason For Investigation	Planning: Post determination
Organisation Responsible for work	Wessex Archaeology
Project Dates	04-Jul-2022 - 15-Jul-2022
Location	Blake Road, Cirencester, Gloucestershire NGR : SP 02348 02458 LL : 51.7208415692316, -1.96740994070393 12 Fig : 402348,202458
Administrative Areas	Country : England County : Gloucestershire District : Cotswold Parish : Cirencester
Project Methodology	The proposed development consists of the mechanical excavation of a pit of up to 2.5 x 2.5 m in order to facilitate the insertion of a flap valve. The ground into which the pit was excavated consisted largely of disturbed ground from the main sewer construction.
Project Results	The excavation to install the flap valve at the Site has revealed heavily mixed modern backfill deposits. These alterations correspond to previous groundworks for sewerage and other services. Thus, no archaeological deposits were encountered or finds collected.
Keywords	
Funder	
HER	Historic England review - unRev - STANDARD
Person Responsible for work	
HER Identifiers	
Archives	Physical Archive, Documentary Archive - to be deposited with Corinium Museum; Digital Archive - to be deposited with Corinium Museum;



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Site location

Figure 1



Figure 2: South-west facing section. 1 x 1 m scale

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