

Excavations at Brislington Meadows

Ken Taylor (June 2023)

As part of their application for a housing development at Brislington Meadows, the landowner - Homes England - commissioned an archaeological evaluation of the site. Following a desk-based survey and a geophysical survey, in November 2021 Cotswold Archaeology opened 26 trenches that were positioned both to investigate geophysical anomalies and also to provide a random view of conditions elsewhere at the site (their report was published in 2022).



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Google maps happened to capture Brislington Meadows soon after the excavation trenches were backfilled.

Excavations in the southwest of the site unearthed a network of enclosure ditches up to 1.8m wide and 0.52m deep. These contained Roman pottery (some of a distinctly domestic type) dating from the 1st to the 4th centuries, as well as metalworking debris (ironworking, and non-ferrous casting) including part of a crucible. Another ditch, 4.4m wide and 1m deep was unearthed inside the area criss-crossed by those interconnected ditches, but the relationship between it and them (if any) wasn't determined.

Other excavated features included two circular pits, the largest of which was 0.84m in diameter and 0.41m deep; and one - more egg-shaped in cross-section - which measured 1.08m by 0.88m and 0.14m deep. Two postholes were also found, the larger of which measured 0.42m in

diameter and 0.2m deep and contained 3rd to 4th century Roman pottery, four iron nails, and waste fragments of various types of glass, as well as a hoard of 72 small glass beads (many of which were broken). The various dates of the different types of blue, black and green beads converge to suggest the cache was deposited in the late 4th century. It seems likely this collection of glass was brought together with a view to recycling.

Forty five sherds of pottery were catalogued, one of which was a 2nd century sherd of decorated samian from central Gaul (France), probably from an item of fine tableware. Other fragments represent more modest pottery types and were mainly (18 sherds) black burnished ware from Southeast Dorset, and a couple of fragments of Severn Valley ware. Ten sherds with fabric tempered by grog and quartz date to the 1st or 2nd centuries (grog is fired clay that has been ground into small chips or even powder, and is added to the clay of new vessels to improve their strength and enhance resistance to cracking in the kiln). Other types include micaceous greyware and coarsewares.

The mixture of domestic and industrial remains in this small area of Brislington Meadows, along with the associated ditches, pits and postholes, isn't easy to categorise as a single type of site. It's notable that much of the pottery predates the building of Brislington's Roman villa (late 3rd century), giving us a glimpse into the lives of local Iron Age Britons in the 1st century as they adapted to the encroaching cultural influence of the Roman Empire. It may be no coincidence that this site apparently fell out of use in the late 4th century, as Brislington villa itself is thought to have been destroyed at that time - around 370AD.

These remains surely represent a small part of an extensive - and as-yet undetermined - complex of Late Iron Age / Roman activity in that area. More clues to help unravel its mysteries remain in the ground nearby, and it can be expected that further excavation will take place before the proposed housing development destroys this local heritage forever.

Bibliography

Cotswold Archaeology 2022, *Brislington Meadows Brislington Bristol Archaeological Evaluation*, https://reports.cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk/content/uploads/2022/06/CR0810-Brislington-Meadows-Bristol-EVAL-report-CR0810_11.1.pdf (accessed 14 Apr 2023).