

Chewton Mendip 2012

Ongoing excavation update

Pip Osborne

Issue 50, pp 32-34 of *Camertonia* reported on the excavations within a proposed Saxon Minster precinct at Chewton Mendip, Somerset, being led by Pip Osborne. The field in question, lying to the immediate north of the parish church had revealed interesting geophysical anomalies in 2010. Subsequent excavation in 2011 established a substantial, rectilinear building of 7.80m external width and of, as yet, unknown overall length.

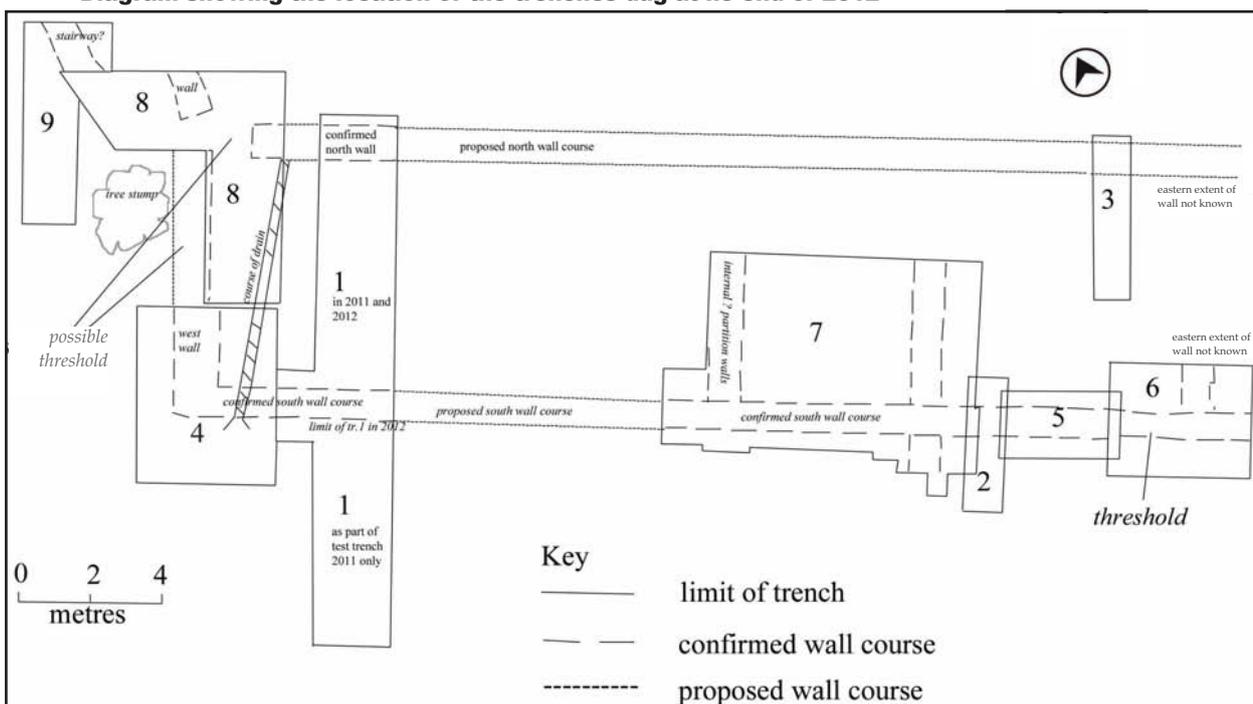
Excavations in April 2012 concentrated on trying to establish where the east end lay. Disturbance from a 20th Century water pipe, cutting diagonally across the building, and an area of high resistivity east of the pipe renders the geophysics of little use in these areas.

April 2012

Trench 7 was dug to locate the pipe and to see what possible damage to the archaeology it might have caused (see *Figure 1 for location*). We were relieved to find it had impacted very little on the archaeology, cutting a neat trench through the south wall and presumably the north wall too, though this has yet to be exposed in this area. This trench established that the building had two substantial internal walls at 90° to the south wall. A layer of rubble dump, an overall characteristic of this site, covered the internal floor surface, reinforcing the view that this building had been systematically robbed out and the ground levelled at some unknown date in the past. Within this trench and not encountered elsewhere, was a dark soil layer, and also evidence of heat damage within the stone coursing of the west face of the more easterly internal wall.

Trench 6 was dug to the east of Trench 7, again following the south wall in the hopes of encountering the east gable end (see *Figure 2*). Whilst uncovering a threshold within the south wall and a fine cobbled entrance, we once again failed to find the end of the wall. This building is now at least 29 metres in length. Yet another wall running at 90° was found to the immediate east of the threshold, and appeared to be the southwest corner of yet another room. The internal threshold area was also covered in cobble, begging the question as to whether this might have been some kind of internal courtyard. In fact we now have to consider whether we may have a complex of buildings all butting up to one southern façade wall facing the church.

Figure 1
Diagram showing the location of the trenches dug at the end of 2012



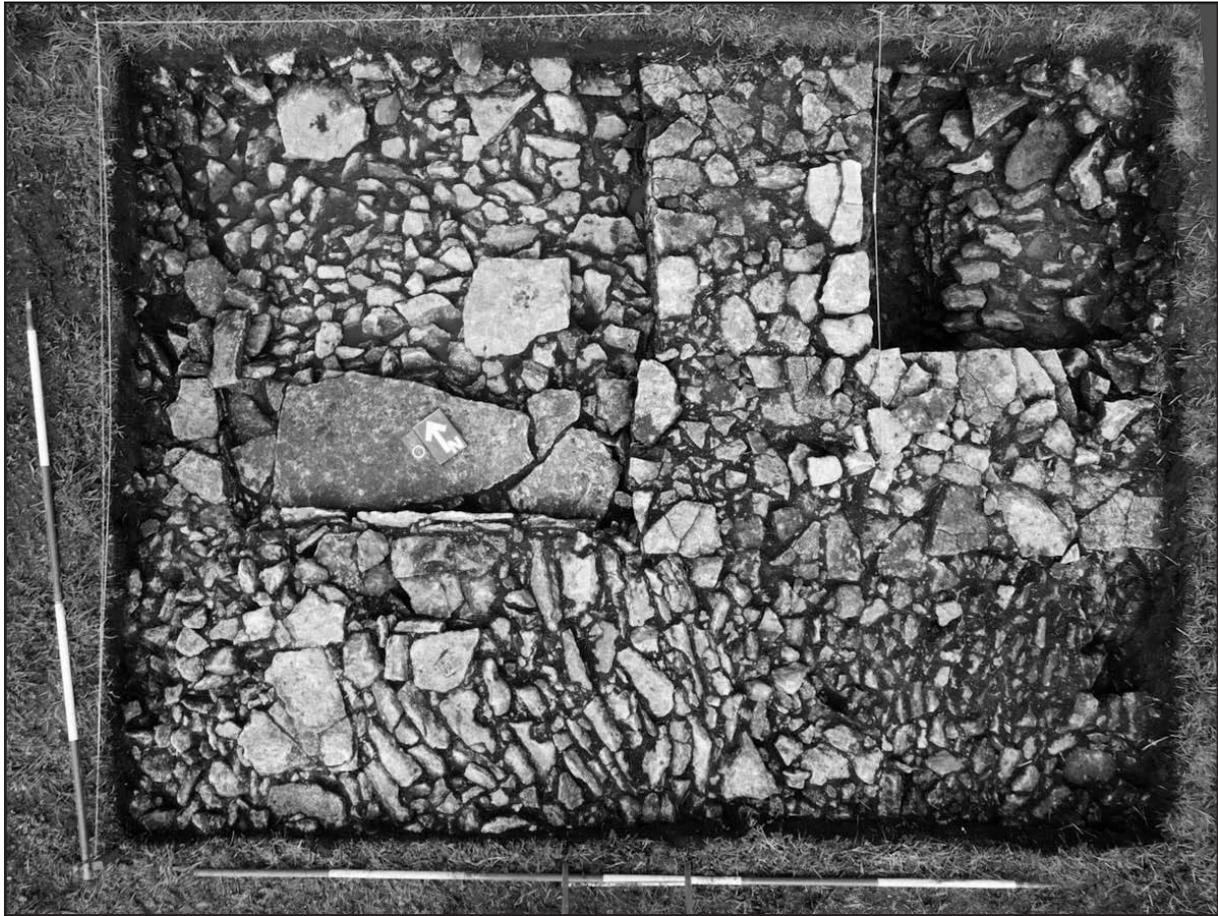


Figure 2 above
Aerial photo of
Trench 6 showing
threshold in south
wall with cobble
surface on either
side, and the beginnings
of a possible further
room to the east.
(J.Croxford)

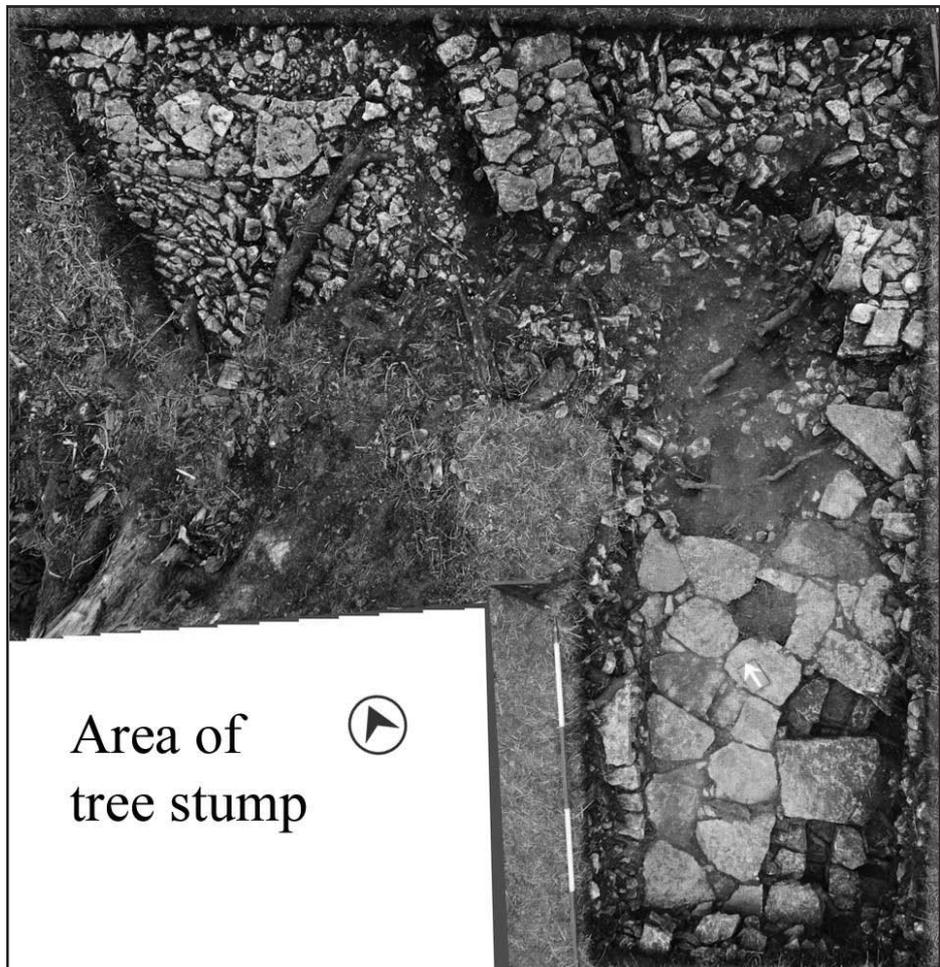


Figure 3
Trench 8 shows the
continuation of the
drain, the cobble
exterior ground
surface and additional
wall leading off from
the building's
northwest corner.
(J.Croxford)

Area of
 tree stump



August and November 2012

In August the original test Trench 1 was reopened within the north and south walls and dug down to the natural in places. An additional Trench 8 (see Figure 3) was laid out parallel and to the west, with a metre baulk between trenches. This was in order to locate the continuation north of an underfloor drain, found last year in Trench 4, and also to catch the west gable end of the building. We were successful on both counts and also uncovered a curious oval, pitched, cobble floor surface, a feature of both the trenches. Its purpose remains a mystery. Lack of wall coursing in the west gable end suggests a further entrance, with exterior cobbling uncovered just beneath turf level on the northwest corner, mirroring that previously found to the southwest. A wall, thought to be of later date, was found to run from the northwest corner of the building at a different orientation. Unfortunately, the roots of a large sycamore tree stump have obliterated crucial archaeological evidence in this area.

Trench 9

In November we undertook one final small excavation when, despite encountering snow, our efforts to further investigate the cobble to the northwest of the building were rewarded by finding a flagstone-topped, retaining kerb. Abutting this was a substantial wall foundation one metre wide and at 45° to the building orientation, heading off downhill. This confirms a curvilinear anomaly on the resistivity. A curved wall in this situation is indeed curious and as yet we have no idea how it relates to the building, or indeed the other wall found in Trench 8. Lying at its base under yet more rubble were 5 sherds of glazed medieval jug (see Figure 4). This is the first of its kind for the site and may give a hint that perhaps this was more than just an agricultural building, as first thought. We hope to find further evidence of dwellings in due course.



Figure 4
The sherds of medieval jug found in Trench 9, now confirmed as 13th Century Bristol ware. Black/white scale 10cm.

There is much yet to be discovered about this intriguing site and the excavations will go on for some time to come.

I am indebted to the landowners for their continued support and permission to access the field and also to all the excavators, some from BACAS, from CHERT (Charterhouse Environs Research Team) and some from my own group CAMP (Community Archaeology on the Mendip Plateau). Also to all the professionals in their various fields, who are so generous in giving of their time to the project.

Interim Reports are published on the CAMP website www.camplat.btck.co.uk