

Durley Hill Roman Villa

A re-evaluation of Durley Hill Roman Villa Keynsham

The Roman 'Villa' at Durley Hill in Keynsham has been known of and excavated on several occasions in the last 100 years.

The Durley Hill cemetery site was subject to an excavation in 1924 by the archaeologist Arthur Bulleid, which uncovered a substantial building, subsequently known as

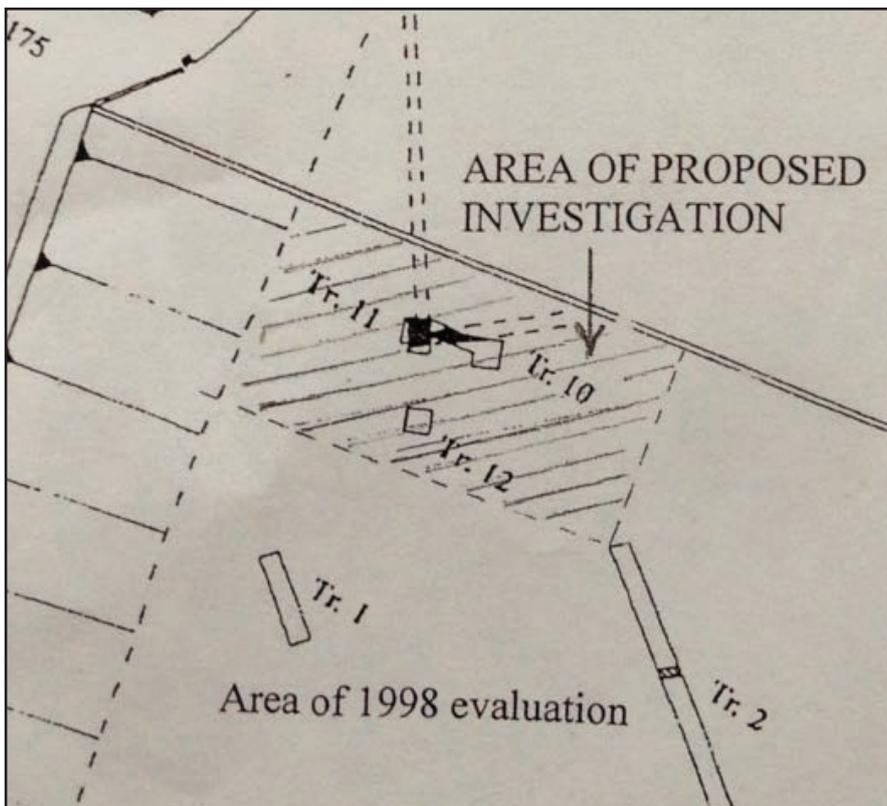
Garry Pratt Durley Hill Roman Villa (see Figure 2). Further smaller-scale excavations were undertaken (by Avon Archaeological Unit) and other recordings made when some graves were re-cut and when the cemetery was extended to the South-East.

More recently, the site has been placed in a wider landscape context after a Geophysical survey of the Hams area (Bath & NE Somerset Council) in 2012 revealed road networks, surviving Roman buildings, and a possible temple complex on the Cadbury Somerdale Factory site to the North-East of Durley Hill Cemetery. This major settlement site has been interpreted as being the town of Trajectus, described in the Antonine Itinerary and an important settlement between Bath and the port of Sea Mills on the Severn estuary.

The probable identification of the Roman town of Trajectus in close proximity and work at other Roman villas by the ARA (Association of Roman Archaeology) has called into question whether this site is actually a villa at all.

Following permission to investigate an area close to the 'Villa' in an extension of Durley Hill Cemetery, a geophysical survey was completed in late October 2013. Resistivity, profiling and ground-penetrating radar surveys were completed.

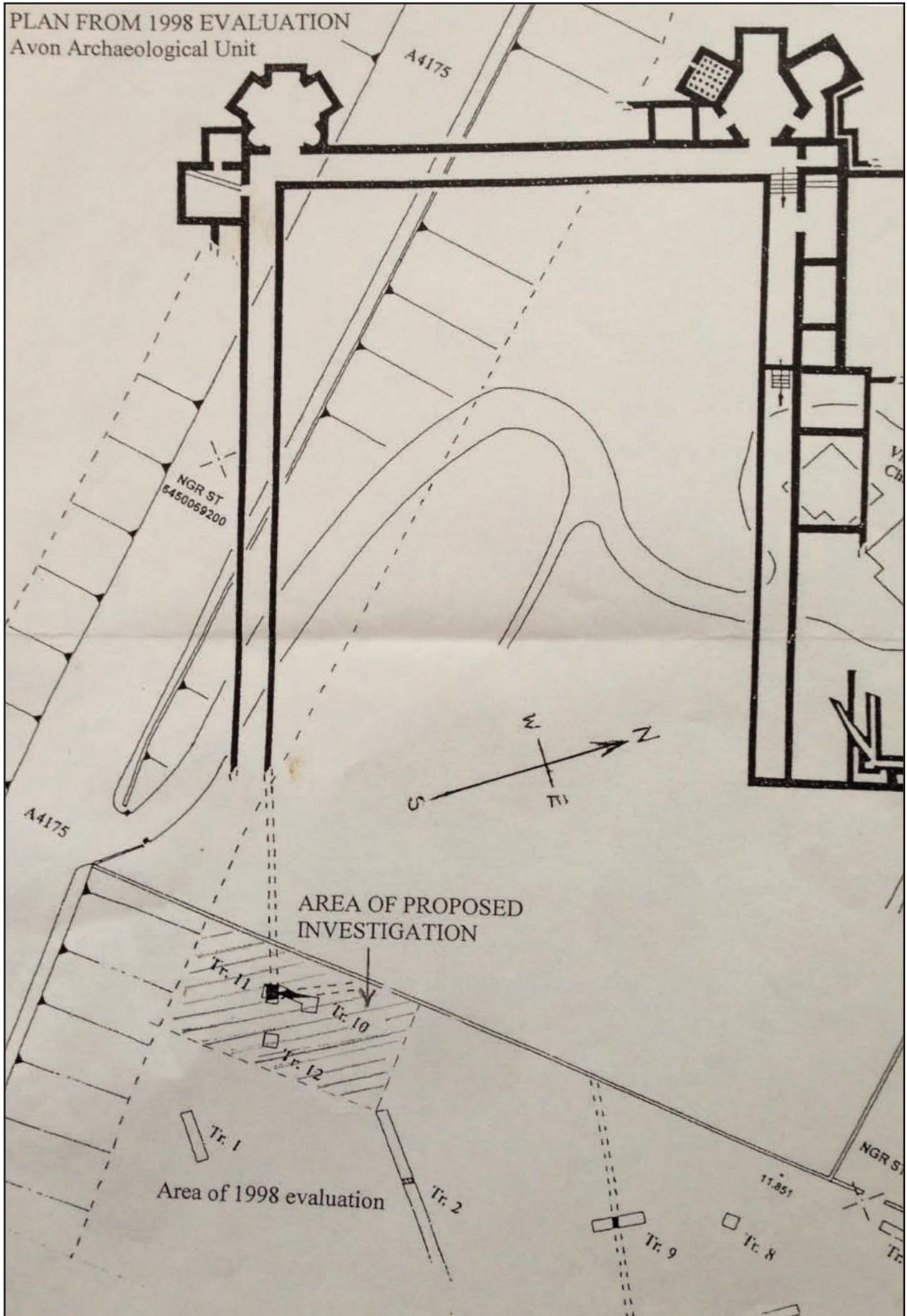
The results of the resistivity survey can be seen overleaf, in Figure 3. while Figure 4 shows the survey site, resistance results and some chosen features identified as A: Major East-West wall; B: Minor North-South wall; C: Possible second East-West wall; D: Secondary features.



Interpretation of a geophysical survey alone is inevitably somewhat ambiguous. However, the varied nature of the surveys carried out and the results from the previous 1998 excavations identify A as the subsurface foundation wall found in trenches 10 and 11 of the Avon Archaeological Unit excavation extending West towards the South corridor of the main villa and under the modern wall of the main cemetery. The survey also confirms that this wall does terminate at its relation with feature B.

Figure 1
Detail of area under investigation.

Figure 2
Plan of Durley Hill Villa from 1998 evaluation showing Bulleid's (1924) plan.



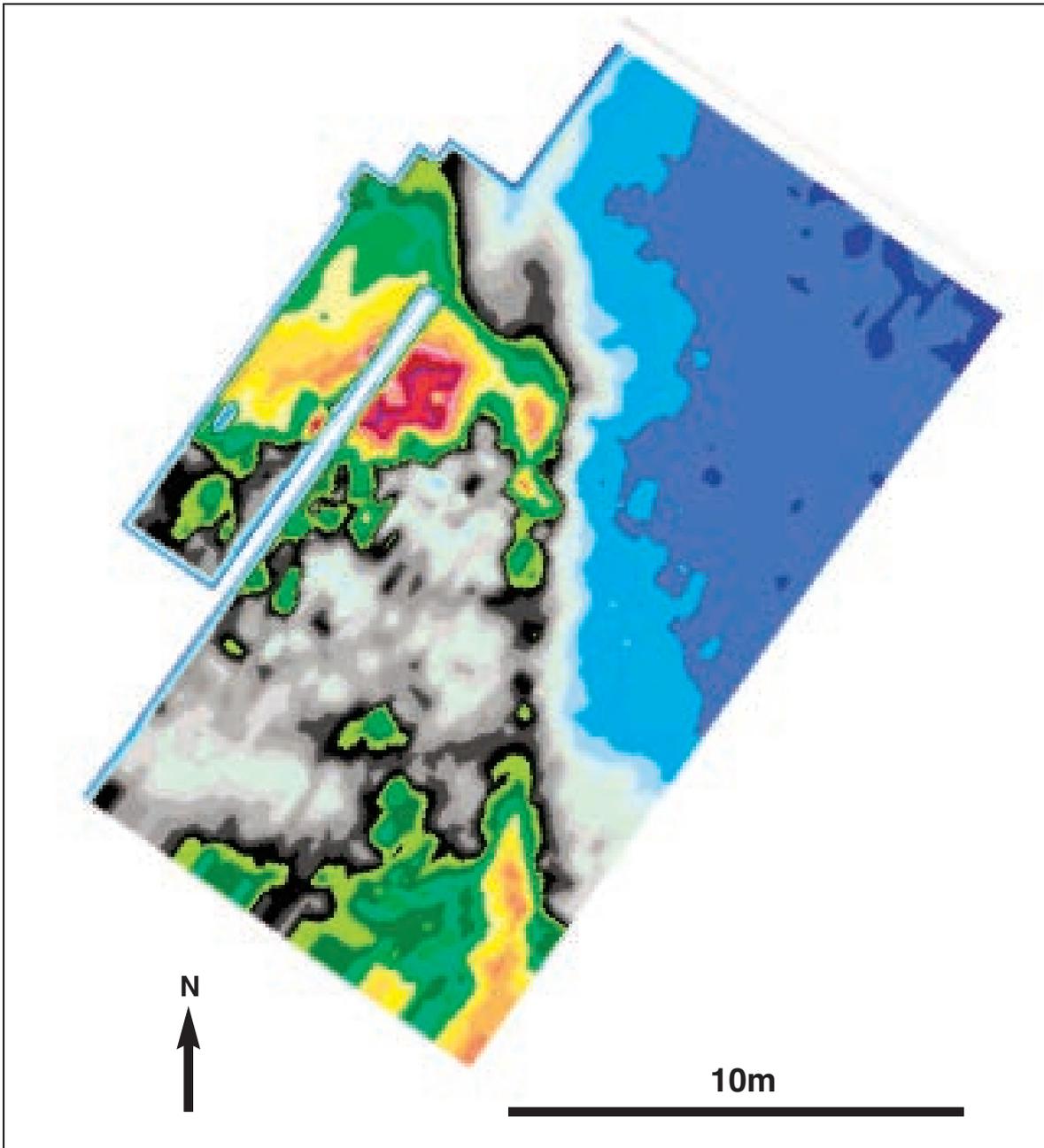


Figure 3
Durley Hill cemetery extension Resistivity results.

The results also indicate that this is a very substantial foundation, up to 2m in width. This suggests the original building above had two or more storeys.

From our survey results this wall is orientated at approximately 270° from North. The building shown on the 1998 plans incorporating Bulleid's 1924 plan includes the Southern corridor orientated at 286°. If the original plans are at all accurate then it can be concluded that wall A is not simply an extension of the South corridor, but a separate substantial building.

Feature B is less substantial than A, which also is consistent with the findings of the 1998 excavations. In the 1998 report it is suggested that this wall formed the Eastern side of a sunken room or chamber and perhaps our survey results suggest a portal or opening in this wall between features A and C.

Feature C is less clear as the survey area was immediately bounded to the South by the road embankment. However, the high readings and anomalies in this area do lend themselves to being

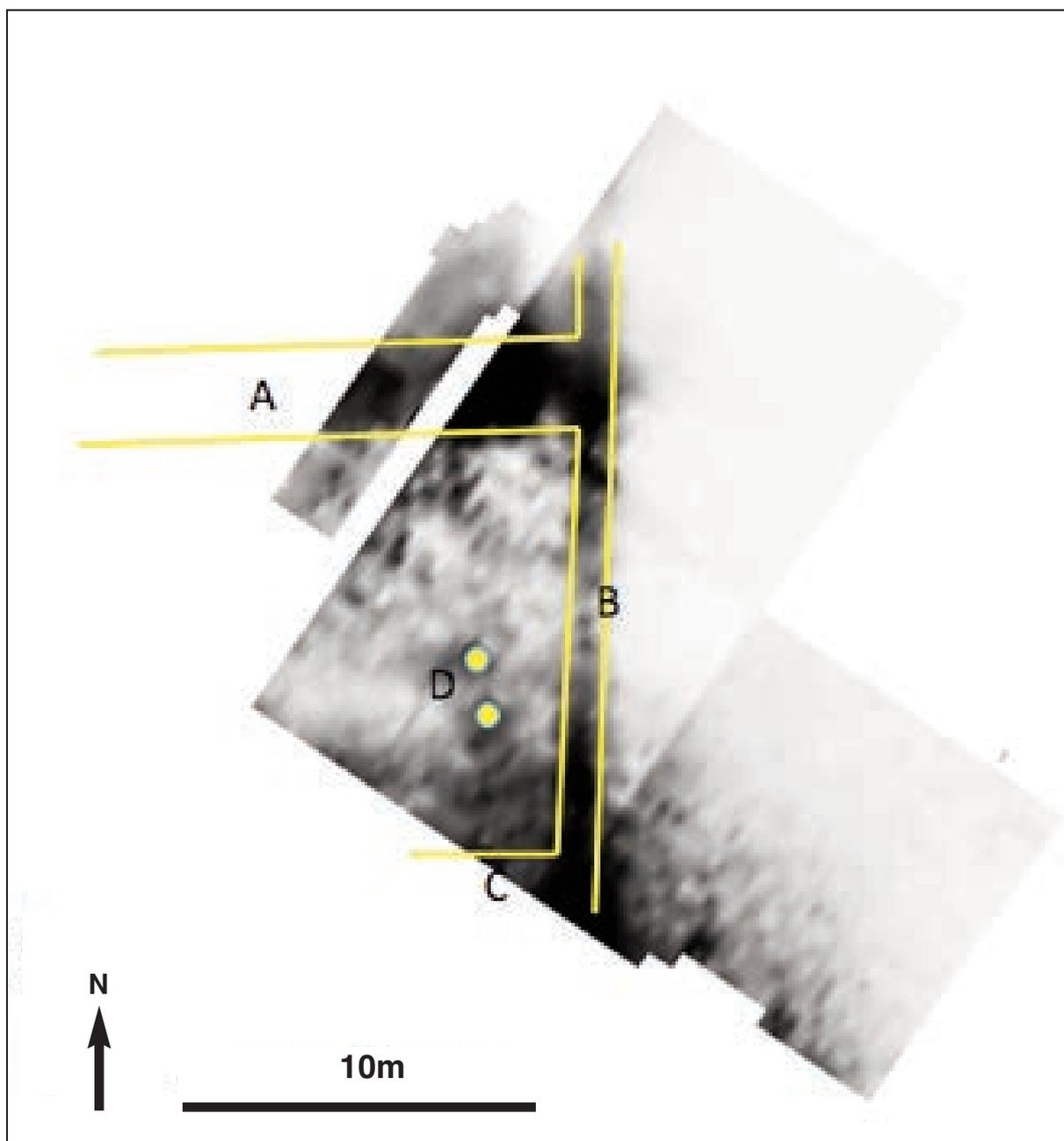


Figure 4
Survey site, resistance results with specific features identified A: Major East-West wall; B: Minor North-South wall; C: Possible second East-West wall; D: Secondary features.

interpreted as a further substantial wall similar and aligned to feature A. Only excavation in this area would confirm that conjecture.

This survey increases our knowledge of the villa complex and the buildings associated with it, and extends our view of the features uncovered in the 1998 test excavations at the site.

From the survey it can be concluded that these substantial masonry walls and possible room are not a simple extension of the South corridor of the villa, but a separate building, albeit probably related and possibly adjoining. The size of the foundation walls suggests that it was a building of some size and importance.

Given the wider context of the site's relation to the probable Roman town of Trajectus, the Durley Hill Roman Villa may well need to be re-evaluated. Further surveying and possible excavation would be required to adequately answer the question of its absolute form and function.