

Banwell Wint Hill

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The Romano-British site at Wint Hill between Banwell and Winscombe has been excavated on many occasions since 1950 but still does not seem to be generally known. It extends over several fields, has good earthworks and is likely to have been the main Roman settlement in the valley of the River Lox Yeo, the wide valley probably indicated in the nearby place name Winscombe. Excavations were carried out from 1954 to 1956 by members of the Axbridge Caving Group and Archaeological Society. Remains of burials were found which had been dug through demolished Roman structures. Near to a Roman wall was found a late Roman glass bowl – of a type made in the Cologne/Rhineland area of Germany in the fourth century (and probably in use and lost in the fifth century) and sometimes displaying Christian iconography – which was sold by the farmer to the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. Material remains of only one of the burials was kept and this is now on display in Axbridge Museum; it was covered in PVA and so is not suitable for radiocarbon dating. The bones from the other burials were disposed of, down an old mine shaft, found on the site, by one of the directors who was superstitious about them! Recently however John Chapman, who was around at the time of the excavations (opposite), found a box of bones from the site in Axbridge museum and it was decided to try to get radiocarbon dates from them. Jackie McKinley selected left humeri from the skeletons of two young adult females and they were sent to Glasgow for radiocarbon dating. The results were as follows:

SUERC 30967 (GU 22223) 430-610AD at 95.4% probability

SUERC 30966 (GU 22222) 660-810AD at 95.4% probability

Other than that these bones are from burials at the Wint Hill site, they of course have no specific context. They do, however, give us some indication of what might be going on. We should perhaps see them as indicating the long use of an inhumation cemetery, potentially over a 400-year period, running from the Roman period through to the time when the Saxon monastery was in existence at Banwell, in the village (now called the Abbey) in the valley on the north side of Wint Hill. Perhaps burial activity was moved down to the monastery site in the eighth century, as seems to have happened at Cannington. If so, was there a pre-Saxon site (a monastery?) on Wint Hill or nearby for which this was the cemetery? Indeed was there a contemporary high-status secular site on the adjacent Banwell Hill, to the east, within the earlier hillfort? A comparable relationship seems to have existed between the settlement on Cadbury Hill at Congresbury and the Roman and early medieval cemetery on an adjacent hill at Henley Wood in Yatton. At Wint Hill a later medieval chapel seems to have marked the earlier cemetery as there are field names including 'chapel' on the Banwell tithe map (Chapel Yard and

Chapel Leaze). But this is speculation at the moment. What is needed is further work, in and around Banwell. This could include re-opening the 1950s trenches on Wint Hill; full publication of the Roman settlement in the adjacent field discovered and excavated when a water pipe was put in from the Banwell water works to the River Lox Yeo in September 1994; and research on the 'Abbey' site in Banwell. For the latter building survey, garden collections, geophysical survey, and perhaps test pits or small scale excavations to retrieve dating material, will be needed.

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