

# Roman settlement, part of an associated field system and earlier Iron Age settlement remains at Gatcombe Farm

## Official list entry

Heritage Category: **Scheduled Monument**

List Entry Number: **1011978**

Date first listed: **05-Dec-1955**

Date of most recent amendment: **27-Nov-2014**

Location Description: The area is approximately 250m north of Cambridge Batch, Long Ashton, Somerset, at Gatcombe Farm and the land around it. The southern boundary follows the north side of Weston Road from ST5229069723 in the west to ST5324769879 in the east. The northern boundary follows the edge of the Shipley Brake/George's Hill woods from ST5251170223 in the west to ST5294570344 in the east.

## Location

The building or site itself may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

District: **North Somerset (Unitary Authority)**

Parish: **Long Ashton**

National Grid Reference: **ST5276870003**

## Summary

A Roman settlement, an associated irregular aggregate field system and earlier Iron Age settlement remains, overlooking the Land Yeo river valley.

## Reasons for Designation

The Roman settlement, part of an associated field system and earlier Iron Age settlement remains, at Gatcombe Farm, Long Ashton, North Somerset is designated as a Scheduled Monument for the following principal reasons: \* Rarity: as a Roman small urbanised settlement with associated field systems, and with evidence of earlier occupation, the Gatcombe settlement is relatively rare in a national context; \* Potential: the site as a whole has a high potential for adding to our understanding of the contemporary agricultural and industrial methods, and the social and economic changes that the Roman Conquest brought; \* Group value: the area probably formed part of a wide network of Roman sites, with links to settlements in Bath and most probably Bristol.

## History

The settlement, commonly known as the Gatcombe Roman site, was an Iron Age settlement that was Romanised in c. 50-80 AD and grew to become a commercial agricultural centre that traded via a road linking Bath to Portbury or Pill, and possibly north via a road to the River Avon and the town of Abonae beyond. Several phases of farmsteads were established, the last of which was deserted in c.200 AD. A wall up to 5m thick was constructed in the late third or early fourth century, enclosing an area of c.7ha. During the same period the northern part of the site was extensively redeveloped. The once fairly dispersed population at Gatcombe probably retreated behind this defensive wall. Coin evidence shows that the settlement was occupied throughout the Roman period.

The site appears to have been completely abandoned by the C8. Abandonment may have coincided with the onset of bubonic plague in Britain (540-560 AD), which was the period that nearby Cadbury-Congresbury hillfort was re-occupied. To the north-east, a Romano-British field system possibly associated with Gatcombe is scheduled separately with a deserted medieval settlement (SM 22849).

The Roman site was first identified during the excavation of a railway cutting in 1838-39. The stone foundations of buildings, as well as burials within oak coffins and Roman coins, were discovered. Partial excavations have subsequently been conducted at the site by the Clevedon Archaeological Society (1954), Professor B Cunliffe (1965) and Professor K Brannigan (1967-76). The excavations have revealed evidence that the site had several phases of development. At this time it was thought that Gatcombe was a villa site, despite substantial buildings from the Roman period having been located outside the walled area. One of these buildings, at Cambridge Batch, had been excavated in the late C19 and a mosaic pavement of the C3 AD was removed. Later studies have reinterpreted Gatcombe as a Roman small town with associated field systems. Further geophysical surveys were carried out in 2006 and 2009/10, which established that there had been a dense population within the settlement walls as well as significant numbers of extramural buildings. It has also been suggested that the settlement may be a rural estate centre.

The investigations carried out in 2012/3 to the east of Gatcombe Farm confirmed that the land had been divided into fields or enclosures by the first or second century AD, with pit-like anomalies containing industrial waste (probably from metal working) that is most likely associated with these enclosures.

## Details

**PRINCIPAL ELEMENTS** The monument includes a Roman settlement, an associated irregular aggregate field system and earlier Iron Age settlement remains, situated on a south facing slope overlooking the Land Yeo river valley. It is located on the only land-bridge between Broadfield Down to the south and Failand Ridge to the north.

### DETAILS

The settlement, commonly known as the Gatcombe Roman site, is now partially overlain by houses and farm buildings, although there are also extensive areas of well-preserved earthworks.

The earliest features include post holes representing structures dating to the pre-Roman Iron Age. These have been interpreted as the remains of several phases of farmsteads. A C4 wall up to 5m thick was constructed, enclosing an

area of c.7ha. This wall is composed of good quality lias limestone masonry on the inner and outer faces, with an inner filling of carboniferous limestone or marl. The width of the wall foundations suggest an original height of 3m-4m, a size which is unusual for this type of Roman site.

At least 19 building foundations have been identified within the enclosed area. All are dry-stone founded and all are small in plan. The buildings have a random distribution within the enclosure and there is no trace of a street plan. Other Roman materials include Bath freestone copings and finials, stone roof slates, and flagstone and cobble floors. Furthermore, two burials and Chi-Rho graffiti on a potsherd indicate a Christian presence in the Romano-British Community at Gatcombe. *Triticum Aestivum* (bread wheat grains) found within one building were not introduced to Britain in the late fourth century, further confirming the later occupation of the site. A number of buildings, dating to the Roman period, are known to be situated outside of the walled area to the west and south.

The irregular aggregate field system occupies the area to the north and east of the settlement. The field system is defined by a series of linear banks and lynchets which survive between c.0.5m-0.75m in height and 1m-2m in width. These are orientated along the slope of the hill and divide the area up into a series of rectilinear plots. Holloways lead from the north-west of the walled settlement and to the east of Gatcombe Farm.

Coin and pottery finds are numerous (approximately 20,000 pottery sherds) and confirm the site as being commercial with very wide trade links. Stone finds include numerous small decorative and industrial artefacts, querns and mortars, and architectural materials. Other recovered artefacts are of clay, glass, iron and bone/ horn mainly relating to domestic occupancy, Metallurgical remains from a number of buildings relate to industrial working. Waste materials expected for a settlement of this date, includes animal bone fragments are also in evidence. The two adult burials uncovered on the site may be of C5 or C6 date. EXCLUSIONS Excluded from the scheduling are all fence posts and gates relating to the modern field boundaries, although the underlying ground is included. Also excluded are Gatcombe Cottage, the house, outbuildings and tennis court at Gatcombe Court, the farmhouse and buildings at Gatcombe Farm and the metalled surface of the lane, although the underlying ground is included in each case.

## Legacy

The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

Legacy System number: **22848**

Legacy System: **RSM**

## Sources

### Books and journals

Branigan, K, *Gatcombe Roman Villa*, (1977)

Barry Cunliffe, , 'Proceedings of the University of Bristol Spelaeological Society' in *Excavations at Gatcombe, Somerset in 1965 and 1966*, (1967)

Keith Branigan, , 'Current Archaeology' in *Gatcombe*, (1971)

Robert Smisson, , Phredd Groves, , 'Britannia' in *Gatcombe Roman Settlement - A Reappraisal*, (2014)

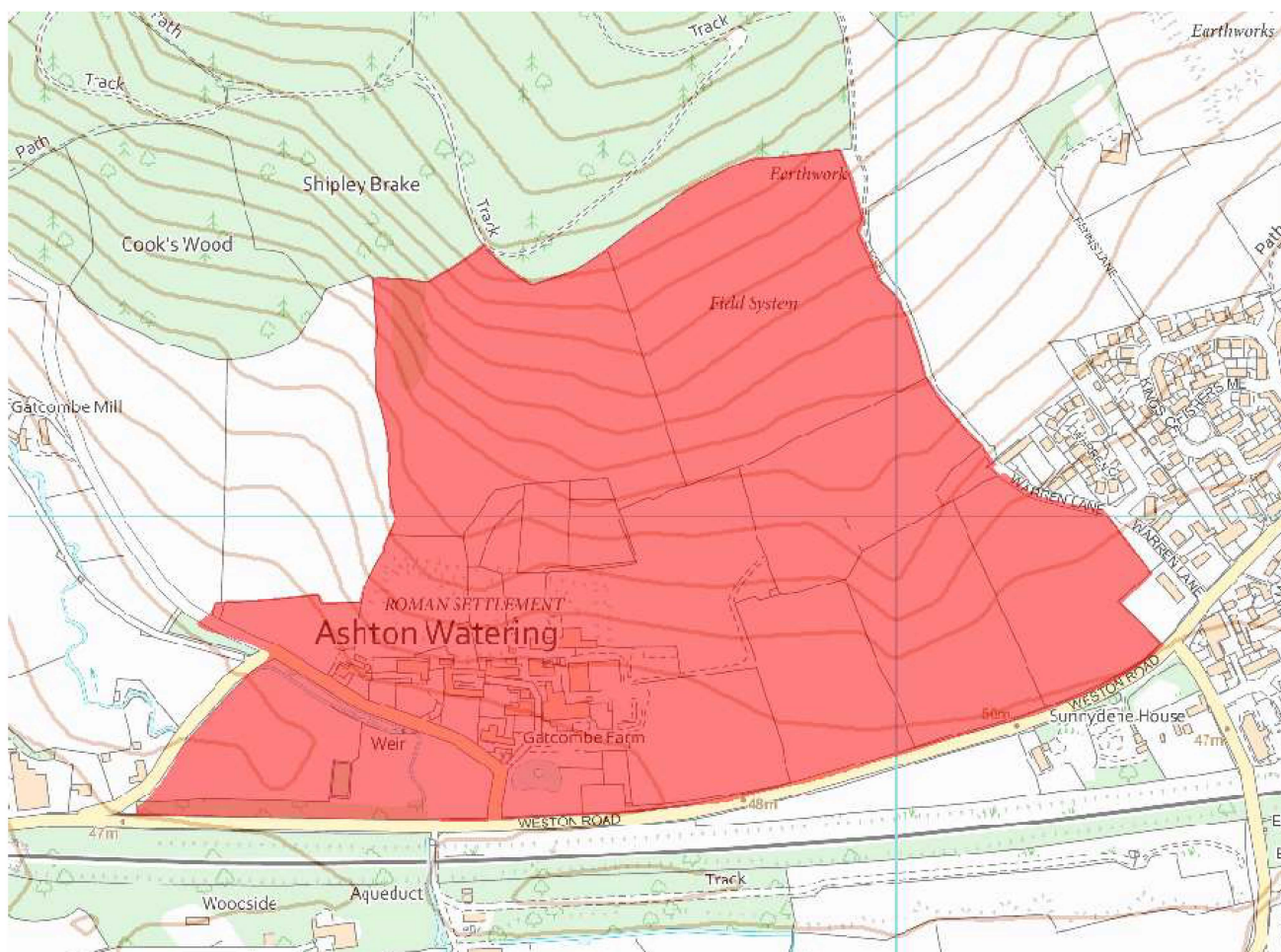
TWJ Solley, , 'Somerset Archaeological & Natural History Society' in *Excavations at Gatcombe, Somerset, 1954*, (1967)

### Other

David Sabin and Kerry Donaldson, *Land at Gatcombe Farm, Long Ashton*, September 2012,

## Legal

This monument is scheduled under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 as amended as it appears to the Secretary of State to be of national importance. This entry is a copy, the original is held by the



## Map

This map is for quick reference purposes only and may not be to scale.  
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End of official list entry

