SUMMARY

This paper describes some of the work of the Somerset archaeologist and local historian Samuel Nash (1913–1985) relating to the coastal alluvial areas of the Somerset Levels between 1956 and 1978. His various archives have become scattered between several libraries, museums and private collections, and one aim of this paper is to provide a handlist of the records that survive. The second aim is to use Nash’s own data to reconstruct the Roman landscape around Burnham-on-Sea and Brent Knoll where a variety of settlements were discovered, some associated with salt production.

INTRODUCTION

Archaeologically, the Somerset peat lands have seen some of the most intensive research of any area in Britain. Work by Bulleid and Gray, Godwin, and John and Bryony Coles, along with many others, has provided a wealth of information with regard to the prehistoric sequence of the inland peat bogs. Towards the coast these peat deposits are buried under later alluvium, and this area of the Somerset Levels, in contrast to the peat lands, has received very little attention. However, between 1956 and 1978 the local amateur archaeologist Samuel Nash was quietly recording the archaeology of this area as it was steadily destroyed by development. He amassed a huge amount of information which has never been given the attention that it deserves.

This paper is an attempt to highlight Nash’s achievements. After a short biography of his life, the important work that Nash carried out on the Roman landscape of the Somerset Levels will be considered (Fig. 1). Nash also collected a large amount of medieval material; that work is summarised elsewhere (Rippon 1994; 1997). Though much of the information is available in typescript reports, deposited in Somerset County Museum, Taunton, and Burnham Public Library, extensive use has been made of a collection of letters written to Stephen Dewar, a former Somerset archaeologist who had moved to Dorchester. These letters are referred to by date, but are at present still in private hands; I would like to thank Mary Kempson, Nash’s daughter, for allowing me to consult them.

SAMUEL NASH 1913–1985

Samuel George Nash, son of a postman, was born in 1913 at Leatherhead, Surrey, and went to Dorking High School. In 1928 he started work as a clerk at an insurance firm in London,
leaving in 1932 to attend Birbeck College, London. Unfortunately he had to leave after a year as his sister had fallen ill and Nash had to earn a wage to help pay for her treatment. During the war he served in North Africa and Italy, and upon returning he briefly went back to the world of insurance, but soon decided he preferred the outdoor life, becoming a gardener. In 1955 he moved to Highbridge, near Burnham-on-Sea in Somerset, working as a clerk at the Sealed Motor Company in Bridgwater until his retirement in 1977. He died in 1985.

For the whole of his time in Highbridge, Nash actively investigated its past. In particular, he recorded the archaeological exposures on every building site he could visit, and completed an impressive amount of documentary research. He was a founder member of the Burnham-on-Sea Archaeological and Natural History Society, with whom he undertook a series of small-scale excavations. In 1971 he was recruited by Dr (now Professor) Peter Fowler, then of Bristol University, to carry out archaeological recording in advance of the M5 motorway construction to the east of Brent Knoll.
THE EARLY YEARS: ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION

'Sam o' the moors', as the late Stephen Dewar called Nash, observed building work, service trenches, quarrying and road construction in some 100 sites in Burnham, and around 300 sites on the coastal alluvium of the Somerset Levels as a whole. His daughter Mary Kempson remembers that 'wherever a building was being built or demolished, Dad was there rooting about in the holes, trowel in hand.' Usually he simply collected any sherds, but in some cases substantial amounts of material were recovered and sections through the alluvium recorded. He carried out several small-scale excavations, sometimes single handed (see Appendix 1). He also observed several major developments where he recovered no material despite deep interventions; such negative evidence can be extremely useful in reconstructing past settlement patterns (Fig. 2; see below).

It is also worth stressing the attention Nash paid to medieval and post-medieval sites at a time when it was the Roman discoveries that attracted most attention. In 1964 he was visited by Norman Quinnell of the Ordnance Survey, who marked around fifty Roman sites on his maps. However, just two medieval sites were added 'because the head of the office was not very interested in medieval' (Nash letter 29.ix.64).

Nash was extremely well read, and not only recorded what he saw, but tried to interpret it. He did not like giving talks but commented 'I think they are good for one – one has to clarify one’s ideas and be sure one can substantiate, with examples or evidence, every statement if questioned afterwards' (Nash letter 8.viii.64). He was very well read, and particularly interested in the work of geologists Kidson and Heyworth from Aberystwyth. They were able to get several samples from an excavation sampled for foraminifera by Dr Haynes of the same University; Nash very much appreciated the importance of palaeo-environmental evidence (Nash letter 14.xii.69). He was particularly pleased when others took an interest in his work, and was 'most honoured' by the Ordnance Survey's interest and the fact that two of his sites would be marked on the 'Map of Roman Britain' (Nash letter 9.ii.74).

In 1972 he told Dewar that 'in short I have given up excavating and now devote my leisure to documents' (Nash letter 8.x.72). His last excavation was in 1974, when a brick vault of c. 1750 was opened in Berrow church and he was asked to take charge of its emptying (Nash letter 26.i.74). Meanwhile, he had started to transcribe the parish records, wrote a history of Burnham church and monthly articles for the parish magazine.

THE LATER YEARS: GENERATING AN ARCHIVE

Late in 1971 Nash had started to show an increased concern over the archives of his work – 'some thirty files, each 1–2 inches thick on 62 Roman sites and some 200 medieval and post-medieval' (Nash letter 10.xii.71). He finally produced three lists of unstratified material and seven excavation reports. Copies of these, and his finds, went to Somerset County Museum.

Nash kept meticulous accounts of his work, compiling numerous lists and reports. Unfortunately, these records have become scattered, and many are not easily accessible. The material is considered in detail elsewhere (Rippon 1993), and has been selectively exploited in several other works (Nash 1972–3; 1974; Rippon 1991; 1994; 1997). What follows is intended in part as a guide to the available material, including the numerous typescript and manuscript reports. A full list of Nash's sites, including those producing medieval and post-medieval material is to be found in Rippon 1993, Appendix 2.B. Nash's letters to Dewar contain much information, including sketch sections, not included in his other archives; where they are used here they are referenced by date (i.e. 'Nash letter [date]').

In one of his last letters to Stephen Dewar, Nash reviewed his work, and made an obser-
vation that all archaeologists should heed: ‘Archaeology I fear, plays a very small part in my life at present, but I am hoping it is not the end and that I shall be able to do a little more yet. Is it not curious that so much was uncovered during the years I was busy in the field and that nothing has been since. Such a contrast, viewed on a country wide scale, makes one wonder whether our archaeological maps, with their concentrations here and empty spaces there, are hopelessly misleading’ (Nash letter 19.vi.75).

THE ROMAN TOPOGRAPHY OF THE BURNHAM AREA

In 1972–3 Nash published in these Proceedings a very brief account of ‘A Deep Water Inlet at Highbridge’ (Nash 1972–3). That paper (reduced from his ‘magnum opus’ of some 12,000 words) is a wholly inadequate summary of Nash’s important observations around Sandyway Farm (formerly Huish) in Highbridge, near Burnham-on-Sea. More detail of those observations is provided below, including the critical stratigraphic detail, and suggestions are made concerning the nature of the Roman landscape in this area during the Roman period. A number of additional manuscript and typescript reports written by Nash are also used (see Appendix 2 below). These are cited in this paper by file number or date. Where Nash’s references to tithe map field-names, tithe map plot numbers, or his own site numbers can be correlated, this information is also given in citations. All measurements have been converted to metric. The pottery dating was carried out by Roger Leech as part of his doctoral research (Leech 1977a). I would like to thank Dr Leech for allowing me to use this information.

Nash quite rightly postulated the existence of a substantial tidal creek to the south of Highbridge and another to the south of Brent Knoll (Fig. 2; Nash 1972–3, Fig. 1; Rippon 1997, 63). The former can be termed the ‘proto-Brue’, as it predates the present River Brue which is a medieval creation (Rippon 1997, 213). The broad corridor of this channel complex lay between the village of Highbridge to the north, and the gravel island at Alstone to the south (Fig. 1; based on Findlay 1965). This island is now partly buried by alluvium, though Nash observed its submerged northern edge just to the south of the present canalised Brue (Fig. 2; based on Nash nd., Fig. 2).

There are traces of the ‘proto-Brue’ in the present landscape. The modern River Brue is a medieval canal that cut into the naturally meandering course of the Westhill Rhine, which formed the Burnham parish boundary (Fig. 2); this appears to have been the last surviving remnant of the ‘proto-Brue’. Apart from the pattern of field-boundaries, the slightly lowering nature of this area is suggested by the medieval name Broad Wharf for the area south of Bristol Bridge. Deep finds of Roman material in this area also suggest the presence of a substantial channel (see below).

The other substantial palaeochannel lies along the Burnham–Berrow/South Brent parish boundary. This river, known as the Siger, marked the southern edge of the 7th century Brent estate granted to Glastonbury Abbey, but has almost totally silted up (Fig. 2; Rippon 1994). It is now only perceptible as a slight depression under flood conditions (Aston 1985, Fig. 54). Nash observed the construction of a housing estate over the line of the channel, close to where the Burnham to Berrow road dips slightly as it crosses the old river course. He noted ‘problems with drainage in an east–west oriented depression with clay rising on each side and a great depth of sand between’ (Nash letter 9.v.66). To the south of Brent Knoll, the Siger turned south, though a tributary continued eastwards. The southern continuation of the Siger can be traced through a detailed contour survey carried out in advance of the M5 motorway (information from Roger Leech). This shows it continuing as far as Isleport Farm, and then bearing east towards Burnham Moor Lane; another tributary flowed west towards Edithmead.
Roman Settlement on the Somerset Coast

The position of the Roman coastline is unknown, but may have been several hundred metres to the west of its present position, as this part of the Severn Estuary seems to have experienced considerable coastal erosion over the past two millennia (Allen 1990; Fulford et al. 1994). The date of the belt of sand dunes that currently protects this stretch of coast is not known. None of Nash's excavations here went down any further than medieval horizons (see Appendix 1), though further up the coast at Weston-super-Mare recent observations of building work have revealed two layers of stratified Roman occupation, sealing and sealed by blown sand, suggesting that here at least the dunes were in existence by the Roman period (information from Peter Berridge of Woodspring Museum).

The Roman sites around Highbridge – at Marine Drive, Worston and Highbridge itself – appear to have lain on a levee by the northern bank of the 'proto-Brue'. The area might also have been slightly higher and drier because of localised deposits of blown/waterlain sand forming a continuation of the belt of coastal sand dunes (Fig. 2). The road between Highbridge and Burnham ran along this possible levee, and was known as 'Sandyway'. Deposits of sand were recorded by Nash in various locations along this road, and at the Fairford Road sites (Fig. 3; Nash Oct. 1975; Nash letter 9.v.66). The Lighthouse Inn site near Marine Drive (see below) was once called 'Holdbeaches', possibly derived from Old Beaches. Roman material was recovered from a depth of 0.6 m from the vicinity of a sand-filled channel (Nash letter 22.viii.69).

ROMAN OCCUPATION ON THE BANKS OF A TIDAL PILL (Figs 2 and 3)

Sandyway Lane (Huish)

In the Roman period, the northern edge of the 'proto-Brue' channel complex appears to have lain roughly along the line of Sandyway Lane. A 60 m section, oriented north-west/south-east, alongside this road by Sandyway Farm (formerly Huish) showed a layer of redeposited Roman material in an unevenly eroded clay/silt, sloping down into this channel from a depth of 0.84 to 1.37 m (Fig. 4; Nash nd, site C1, Fig. 5). West of this, worn Roman material was found to a depth of 1.27-1.45 m (Nash nd, Fig. 5).

Just to the north of these sections, Nash excavated an occupation deposit, or possibly a briquetage mound (Nash nd, C4). This section is worth describing in some detail.

1. -2.33 m: black peaty loam with 'rufous staining'. Contained a lias slab and near complete Roman vessel shattered into large unabraded sherds. This sounds like the basal fill of a channel.
2. 2.09-2.33 m: 'yellow--brown clay/silt'. Foraminifera suggest an estuarine intertidal environment, near MHWST, but with direct tidal access (report by Dr Haynes, Aberystwyth University, in Nash nd, Appendix B). Some Roman material. This is suggestive of the fill of a tidal creek.
3. 1.93-2.09 m: 'blue/black' layer (0.13 m thick); suggestive of an organic-rich deposit forming in the largely silted up remnant of the channel.
4. 1.80-1.93 m: 'tenacious yellow--brown clay with blue clay intrusions' (0.13 m thick); very clean interface with layer below. This may be imported clay deposited as a made surface.
5. 1.67-1.80 m: very compact layer of finely crushed briquetage with localised areas of ash. Lias stones, pottery, animal bone, charcoal and pebbles (38 mm thick). This deposit is typical of the local Roman salt production sites, known as briquetage mounds.
6. 1.57-1.67 m: thin layer of blue clay (0.10 m thick) with very little Roman material; presumably a flood horizon.
7. 1.49-1.57 m: 'dark blue--grey silt' (c. 8 mm) with some Roman material; possibly indicative of renewed occupation in the vicinity.
8-9. 0.61-1.49 m: brown--blue clay; the foraminifera again suggest a saltmarsh environment near MHWST. This probably indicates a sustained period of inundation seen elsewhere in the coastal zone of the Somerset Levels in the late/post-Roman period (Rippon 1991; 1997, 123–7).
10. 0-0.61 m: disturbed brown clay containing Roman, medieval and post-medieval material.
The Roman ground surface (layer 4) at Huish lay 1.9 m below the modern surface, though there appears to have been c. 0.6 m of post-medieval soils dumped here. This is far deeper than at other sites in the area. At site D4, c. 180 m to the north, there was 0.9 m of post-Roman alluvium, and c. 1.1 m at the Burnham Brewery/King Alfred’s School sites c. 1.1 km along the banks of the ‘proto-Brue’ to the north-west of Huish. A buried soil, c. 0.6 m below the surface, probably Roman in date, is recorded at the Bristol Bridge Clay Pit c. 0.6 km to the east. These sites are all described in more detail below.

The Roman occupation horizon at Huish C1 sloped from north to south (Fig. 4), in keeping with the presence of a water channel to the south. A water main trench running down the road past Huish uncovered ‘blue sand for a depth of 1.4 m’ (Nash letter 16.v.71), suggesting a palaeochannel. Despite observations on a large number of sites, very little Roman material was recovered to the south of Sandyway Lane (Nash Jan. 1975, 3: Site 41, ‘Coronation Road’, Plot 468; Site 99N, ‘Saunders Acre’, Plot 469; both sites are c. 200 m to the south of Huish).
Roman Settlement on the Somerset Coast

Fig. 3 Location map of Nash's work around Highbridge.
Fig. 4  Sections through buried Roman sites at 'Huish' (Sandyway Farm) and Burnham Brewery.
Burnham Brewery

Nash carried out a number of small excavations at the site of the former Burnham Brewery in 1971 (Figs 3 and 4; Nash Jan. 1976, 5; Site 99F–Q, ‘Mill Home Ground’, Plot 376). The major observation was along the ditch beside the former railway line from Highbridge to Burnham. Pottery was recovered from the cleaning of this ditch in 1969 over a stretch c. 30 m long, but concentrating in a c. 12 m stretch (Nash letter 2.xi.69). In 1971 four trenches, 1.2 m square were excavated every 3 m, giving an intermittent section 14 m long; trench B was subsequently extended to 2.9 m. A layer of cobbles was uncovered at a depth of 1.4 m, and extending for 6.7 m to the south of trench A. This was sealed by alluvium. Above this was a second floor, consisting of cobbles and pebbles, lying directly upon clean alluvium, at a depth of c. 1.2 m. It extended for 5.8 m. This was overlain by a ‘dirty brown clay’ containing Roman material. This merged with a dark grey–black clayey peat, 0.1–0.3 m thick, rich in artefacts including pottery (1st to 4th century), animal bone, burnt clay, nails, oyster and mussel shells. There was a wide range of briquetage bars, tiles and vessels (Leech 1977a, Fig. 19). This dark horizon was sealed by a sterile brown alluvium. In trench D to the north, the 0.2 m thick dark grey/black occupation deposit rested directly on alluvium, at a depth of 1.4 m. This was overlain by a cobbled surface, at a depth of 1.1 m.

Leech (1977a, 40–1) raises the possibility that the peaty deposit noted here may have resulted from mixing of flood-deposited clay with fuel-ash derived from salt making. However, a similar peaty deposit has been found on a number of Roman sites on the Somerset Levels unrelated to salt production (e.g. Eastend Farm, Tickenham, in the North Somerset Levels) (Usher 1967). This suggests that these peaty layers may represent a waterlogged organic deposit which formed at the start of the post-Roman marine transgression that affected many of the Severn Estuary Levels (Rippon 1991; 1997, 123–7). In 1972 Nash noted a 0.2 m–thick ‘layer of decayed vegetable matter 45 m from, and at the same depth [c. 1.2–1.5 m] as the Burnham Brewery site’, associated with Roman material (Nash letter 11.vi.72); unfortunately its location is not given. An immediately post-Roman peat was noted by Nash overlying a briquetage mound seen in the section of the Huntspil River (Nash letter 3.i.65). Two thin bands of peat were noted in a deep trench along Worston lane; a briquetage mound was sectioned as well, though unfortunately Nash does not give either its depth or its relationship to the peat horizons (Nash letter 4.iv.72). However, taken together, it would appear as if there was localised waterlogging and ‘peat’ formation during the late/post-Roman period, presumably pre-dating the marine inundation that sealed the sites with alluvium.

At Burnham Brewery, the whole sequence was truncated by a ditch, cut from a horizon c. 0.7 m below the surface (Fig. 4). The lower fill of this comprised sand, containing a few 19th century sherds. This may have been deliberately backfilled when the railway was built.

A number of other observations help to define the limits of this site, concentrated around Marine Drive (Fig. 3). Building work observed in 1972, c. 50 m to the east of the main excavation, found a similar occupation deposit, though the area to the south was sterile (Nash Jan. 1975, 5; Site 99C, ‘Turf House Ground’, Plot 377). To the north, on the site of the Lighthouse Inn, large amounts of Roman pottery were also recovered (Nash Jan. 1975, 5; Site 99B–E, ‘Day’s Ground’, Plot 373); in a letter to Dewar he noted the depth as 0.6 m and that the site was adjacent to a sand-filled channel (Nash letter 22.vii.69). This scatter extended into the eastern corner of the adjacent field, the rest of which was devoid of Roman material (Nash Jan. 1975, 3; Site 33, ‘Kingston’s’, Plot 372), as were fields to the north as far as the coastal sand dunes (Nash nd, Fig. 2; Nash Nov. 1975; ‘Parsonage’ sites, Plots 362, 363). Developments to the west of the railway line, such as Pillsmough Farm and the Hollimarine complex, similarly failed to find any Roman material (Nash Nov. 1975, 1; Nash letter 9.v.66).

King Alfred’s School (Fig. 3)

When a series of drainage channels was dug in the school playing fields at King Alfred’s School, three concentrations of Roman debris and Lias stone rubble were discovered, spread over c. 4 acres (Nash nd, 11; Nash Jan. 1975, 5; Site 89, Plot 380). These were associated with a c. 0.25 m–thick occupation deposit, at a depth of c. 0.6 to 0.8 m, containing much crushed briquetage. This suggests the presence of a series of briquetage mounds once again associated with rough cobbled surfaces.

Fairford Road (Fig. 3)

A series of developments to the north of this road, c. 0.3 km north-east of Huish, failed to produce anything more than a handful of isolated sherds, suggesting that this area marked the very edge of the
Roman occupation (Nash Jan. 1975, 3: Sites 45 and 78, Plot 500; Sites 81 and 87A, Plots 497–9). However, just to the south, an undated ‘thin black horizon’ was noted, containing one undated sherd and several pieces of briquetage, at a depth of 0.8 m (Nash Jan. 1975, 3; Oct. 1975, 2: Site 44, Plots 488–9).

To the west, a Roman occupation horizon up to 0.3 m thick containing pottery and briquetage, was found in a service trench at a depth of c. 0.9 m extending for c. 9 m (Nash nd, 11: D4; Nash Jan. 1975, 6: Site 99M, Plot 482). Finds included complete Roman briquetage bars, lias stone and pennant sandstone roofing slates, one with a pierced hole (Nash letter 2.vi.72). Overall, this evidence suggests a briquetage mound; the location is an unlikely one for a reasonably substantial building as suggested by the roof slate; perhaps this was imported to the site along with the Lias rubble simply to create a stable working area. The site was surrounded by a sterile area, suggesting that this area of activity was distinct from that at Huish c. 200 m to the south-west (Nash nd, 11: D2; Nash Jan. 1975, 5: Site 99M, Plot 486).

**Bristol Bridge and Deep Finds of Roman Material** (Figs 2–3)
A large clay pit by Bristol Bridge (Nash Jan. 1975, 3; Site 34; Plot 924; Nash May 1976) appears to have lain on the line of a northern branch of the ‘proto-Brue’ (Fig. 2). Here, Roman pottery (?)1st to 4th century) was found ‘in quantity’ in the bottom of the pit, c. 2.1 m deep. This material must presumably have been deposited in a substantial natural channel. To the north-west, traces of a buried soil were found. Nash records an ‘old turf the’, containing fragments of bone and burnt clay, c. 70–80 mm thick, at a depth of c. 0.8 m. Above this lay an ‘occupation layer’, containing pottery, at a depth of c. 0.6 m.

This site is one of a number of deep finds, suggestive of material having fallen into a watercourse. At Pitt’s Brick Pit to the south, a Samian vessel is recorded from a depth of 7 m (Nash nd., Fig. 2). Unstratified Roman material from the Apex Brick pit (Fig. 3; SMR 10266) is recorded from an unknown depth, though Nash failed to find any buried soil or occupation deposit (Nash nd, 2–4). Dredging of the River Brue has also produced Roman material (SMR 10956).

**Hastings** (Fig. 3)
One of the most important excavations that Nash carried out was at Hastings, where a substantial Roman building was uncovered (Nash Jan. 1975, 4: Site 73, Plot 513; Nash April 1976; photographs at Somerset County Museum). Roman material was scattered over an area of at least c. 200 m by 50 m, and stratified at a depth of 1.2 m. The building had a well-constructed floor of carefully-laid limestone slabs and cobbles. This was once again sealed by a dark grey/black deposit c. 40 mm thick; Nash considered this to be ‘decaying vegetation’ (Nash April 1976, 6). The finds assemblage included a piece of glass ware, the only site in the area at which this seems to have been the case. Pottery was 2nd to 4th century in date (note in Nash File F.108).

At Clarke’s Two Acres, just to the north of Hastings, a ‘dark gritty layer’ containing much Roman material was found at c. 1.5 m below the present surface (Nash Jan. 1975, 3; Sites 48 and 99D; Plot 511). Slight peat layers were noted at 0.5 m and 0.6 m below the surface. At Old Walls, c. 460 m north of Hastings just two Roman sherds were recovered, though the trenches only reached 1.2 m deep (Nash Jan. 1976). This probably defines the limit of the site to the north.

**ROMAN SALT PRODUCTION ON THE SOMERSET LEVELS**

The Burnham sites that Nash investigated are part of a much wider distribution of Roman salterns in the Somerset Levels and in particular the Brue Valley (see Rippon 1997, 65–74). They are best known in the form of a series of mounds of burnt clay and Roman pottery around the margins of the former raised peat-bog. A total of 167 ‘briquetage mounds’ have been identified, mostly in the area of Gold Corner and the Cripps River, at the eastern edge of Huntspill parish (Rippon 1993, Appendix 2.C.I., and Fig. 2.C.1).

These mounds were first recorded in the early 19th century. Two ‘potteries’ were noted in 1804, at the Old Brue cutting near Bason Bridge (Fig. 2; Hawkins 1973, 75). William Stradling (1850, 56) dug into a mound north of the Poldens, finding Roman pottery, ‘rude bricks bearing the marks of
Roman Settlement on the Somerset Coast

straw', and a square clay platform beside the mound. From the general area, and in some cases it seems from the mounds themselves, numerous moulds for counterfeit coins, and several coin/pewter hoards were found (Stradling 1850, 58). These discoveries formed the basis of Haverfield's (1906) description, though further work had been carried out by Bulleid and Morland in 1889 but not yet published; they excavated one mound, and surveyed forty others (Bulleid 1914). In 1913, Bulleid dug into another three mounds, and surveyed a further ten. Finds included pottery, briquetage (Stradling's 'rude bricks'), and ash. There were no wasters, and no kilns. In comments on Bulleid's paper, Bushe-Foxe stressed this lack of evidence for pottery production (Bulleid 1914, 52).

During 1935–45, the cutting of the Huntspill River revealed numerous further mounds, buried by alluvium (Godwin 1943). Nash observed several of these in 1964–5 (see Appendix 1). Apart from Nash's work, only three recent excavations have occurred. At Lilac Farm near Burtle in 1960 (SMR S.10983) no structure was uncovered, but finds included a 3rd century pot waster, and pottery-kiln-type debris. At Badgworth (Leech 1977b), ditch cleaning cut through a buried mound, the section of which was cleaned. It dated to the late Iron Age/early Roman period. Finally, an excavation took place at East Huntspill in 1978 (Leech et al. 1983) where another mound cut by ditch-cleaning was recorded in section. Chemical analysis of the briquetage proved for the first time that it was used to boil salt water.

With regard to the function of the mounds, there is no doubt that they were involved in salt production. Around Cripps River, Leech (1977a, 40) suggests that the mounds are simply dumps of waste material, with the actual working sites on the adjacent flat ground: hence the clay floor identified by Stradling. The cobbled floors at Burnham Brewery, clay floor at Huish and spreads of stone rubble at sites such as King Alfred's School and Fairford Road D4 may also have served this function. Elsewhere, sites lie on peat hummocks surrounded by bare alluvium. Here, working may have occurred on the mounds themselves, surrounded by a saltmarsh. This is confirmed by the East Huntspill excavation, which found hearths and floors stratified within the mound.

Leech (1977a, 42–4) was in no doubt that these sites were involved in pottery production. The evidence for this is as follows: the sheer quantity sherd, the very limited range of fabrics, and the presence of oxidised, fused and crumbling sherd. The results of the 1960 excavation (SMR S.10983), when a pot waster and 'possible kiln furniture' were found, supports this. Leech argues that the lack of any actual kilns from any of these sites is because bonfire firing would have been used, possibly in the areas in between mounds. Petrological analysis of the pottery from these mounds supports the argument for local production (Williams 1977, 192–3). The BB1 found at several sites was made in Dorset, but two out of three local grey wares used tempering that could have come from local Burtle Beds.

FIELDWORK IN ADVANCE OF THE M5 MOTORWAY (Fig. 5)

Though Nash carried out most of his work around Burnham and Highbridge, one of his most important discoveries was in East Brent. Nash was recruited by Peter Fowler of the M5 Research Committee to be a local recorder during the motorway's construction. Initially Nash was not too enthusiastic; he commented to Dewar 'I think the archaeological potential of the M5, at least on these Moors, is being highly over-rated' (Nash letter 6.xii.69). In March the following year he told Dewar 'I am on the inspection committee for the M5 motorway when it comes through, but I am inclined to treat it as a lot of thunder with no lightning. However, I'll go out and duly inspect' (Nash letter 8.iii.70). He later wrote to Dewar with some excitement, as Roman hypocaust tiles had been found (Nash letter 1.v.70). The site at Lakehouse Farm produced 'a vast quantity of building debris extending for c. 300 ft [c. 90 m]' and included stone walls, sandstone roofing slates, combed hypocaust box tiles, 'fragments of brick presumably the columns supporting the floor', fragments of tegulae and imbrices, painted wall plaster and one fragment of window glass; he specifically states that there were no tesserae and no coins (Nash letters 17.v.70; 25.v.70).

The areas of stone roof tiles were associated with fragments of painted wall plaster; ceramic roof tiles were found in an immediately adjacent area along with hypocaust debris suggesting a bath house. These spreads of material lay c. 2 ft [c. 0.6 m] below the surface. There was also iron slag from a 'burnt patch'. By the end of May his new-found enthusiasm for the motorway is reflected by the
Fig. 5. Roman sites along the M5 at East Brent.
Roman Settlement on the Somerset Coast

comment 'I remain addicted to the motorway, in the belief that it has not yet yielded all its secrets by any means' (Nash letter 27.vi.70).

Unfortunately, Nash did not retain copies of the reports he sent to the M5 Research Committee. However, during research for his doctoral thesis, Roger Leech (1977a) made a photocopy of a typescript report concerning work along the line of the M5 in Edingworth, and manuscript notes on three reports relating to the Lakehouse Farm sites. These formed the basis of a very brief and in places inaccurate published note (Fowler and Walthew 1970). Dr Leech kindly made his records available for this research; copies have now been deposited with Somerset County Museum. The location of Nash's 12 sites is shown on a series a maps, recently discovered in his daughter's attic.

The evidence from each site is listed below. Each 'site' actually corresponds to a field along the line of the motorway. Pottery dating is derived from Leech 1977a, Fig. 19.

Site 1: Lakehouse Farm, ST 35605075–35555063. Buried soil recorded over 74 m (Nash First Report). Two sherds.

Site 1A: Lakehouse Farm, ST 35555063–35505055. Field to south of Field 1 and to north of Field 6; material found over the full length of the field (Nash Second Report); finds included 107 sherds of 1st to 4th century pottery including Samian, coal and iron slag (Leech mss notes). Also, a possible whetstone, a fragment of undecorated box-flue tile, 12 fragments of briquetage and 3 pieces of slag. Associated with a buried soil horizon, c. 0.5 m below the surface.

Site 2: Smithfield Cottage, ST 35005023. Several patches of Lias stones. Roman and medieval pottery. The Roman material tended to concentrate slightly to the south of the medieval (Nash letter 6.ix.70).

Site 3: Chapel Farm, ST 35805145–35805130. A mound of Roman occupation debris. A great deal of pottery and occasional stones (Nash Second Report). Leech does not appear to have examined this pottery, but there are 129 sherds in the Bristol Museum collection. Also a fragment of painted wall plaster, several nails, and 8 pieces of daub.

Site 4: Lakehouse Farm, ST 35655068. The Bristol Museum collection includes 10 sherds along with two pieces of comb-decorated box-flue tile and a fragment of Roman window glass.

Site 4A: Lakehouse Farm, ST 35605055. In extreme south of Field 4 (Nash Second Report); finds were four 2nd to 4th century sherds (Leech mss notes).

Site 5: Lakehouse Farm, ST 35685063. This location produced 229 sherds, 2 pieces of ceramic tile and 19 fragments of fired clay of which 3 might be briquetage. Many pieces of box-flue tile were found according to Nash's letters to Dewar (1.v.70; 23.v.70).

Site 6: Lakehouse Farm, ST 35455050. Material found along the full length of field (Nash Second Report); finds include 19 sherds of 2nd to 4th century pottery, including 2 fragments of Samian, and possible briquetage or daub.

Site 7: Chapel Farm, opposite to Site 3, ST 35885159–35885128. At least 24 sherds from between two droveways [c. ST.359513], and two sherds from north of the northerly drove [ST 359515]. Pottery is 1st to 4th century and includes 1 fragment of Samian; also some possible briquetage though inspection by the author indicates this might be normal daub.

Site 8: Smithfield Cottage, ST 34805010. Lias blocks and 1 Roman sherd from 'deep' down (Nash Third Report).

Site 9: (see Fig. 2): Burnham Moor Lane, ST 342478 (Nash Site 99n); very local scatter of briquetage (Nash Third Report).

Site 10: Somerset Court, ST 344794. Roman sherds.

Several of these sites were associated with what appears to have been a buried soil horizon. At Lakehouse Farm Nash described it as 'a black layer of peat and/or old turf line and/or occupation debris' (Nash First Report). It varied from 6–12 in. thick (0.15–0.3 m). At Edingworth York Farm, Nash described the horizon as 'a level band of grey–brown clay, approx. 25 cms thick, 50–60 cm below ground level'; this marked a continuation of an 'occupation horizon' described as 'a layer of very dark clayey soil ... with charcoal, potsherds, burnt clay and bones' (Nash Typescript Report). The extent of these horizons is shown of Fig. 4.
DISCUSSION OF THE LAKEHOUSE FARM SITE

Though there is no evidence for mosaic pavements from Lakehouse Farm, the under-floor heating suggests a substantial residential building of some wealth. Other well-built stone structures are known from the Levels immediately around Brent Knoll, at Rookesbridge (Russett 1989) and south of Lymsham (Broomhead 1991).

Nash recorded Roman material from several locations at the junction of Brent Knoll and the Levels (Nash letter 25.v.66), and on the alluvium to the east of East Brent village (at a depth of 1.2 m; Fig. 5; Nash letter 15.iii.70). This pattern ‘fen-edge’ settlement is typical of all the Severn Estuary Levels, but so is a trend for settlements to be located on the alluvium, a few hundred metres from much drier bedrock. The substantial building at Lakehouse Farm, out on the Levels in an exceptionally low-lying location, is a fine example.

This part of the Levels is exceptionally low-lying. It was ‘an area that within living memory annually became a lake in winter’ (Nash letter 13.iii.70). The soils are also unusual; they are of the Allerton Series which forms in particularly low-lying locations (Findlay 1965, 114–5). For there to have been a substantial Roman building in such a low-lying location means that the area had to have been free from flooding. By analogy with Weston-super-Mare, the coastline may have been protected by sand dunes, but the Axe must have been contained within floodbanks. The salt production sites south of the Siger required salt water, so the rivers Siger and ‘proto-Brue’ must have been tidal. The north bank of the river Siger must have been embanked to protect the Lakehouse Farm and other sites around Brent. Thus, part of the coastal clay belt of the Somerset Levels was reclaimed in the Roman period, whereas the rest was open tidal saltmarsh (Rippon 1991; 1997, 65–77).

CONCLUSION

It is becoming increasingly clear that all around the Severn Estuary (Rippon 1997, chapter 3) and in other coastal wetlands such as Fenland (Hayes and Lane 1992) Roman occupation concentrates around the mouths and banks of tidal channels. The sites investigated by Sam Nash are good examples and appear to lie on the northern bank of a substantial natural channel which had largely silted up before the cutting of the present, artificial, River Brue in the medieval period. At the Lighthouse Inn site, just to the north of the Burnham Brewery, a small creek actually associated with the Roman occupation was noted by Nash, while at Huish (trench C1), material appears to be tipping into another channel.

There are three obvious reasons for the location of settlements on the banks of these tidal channels. Firstly, river levees provide the highest ground in such areas. Secondly, many of the Highbridge sites appear to have been associated with salt production, for which a source of tidal water is essential. Thirdly, these channels also afforded an easy means of communication; the importance of rivers for transport has recently been graphically illustrated by the discovery of a Roman boat on the Gwent Levels (Nayling et al. 1994).

The Roman occupation horizons in Highbridge generally lie at c. 0.60–0.8 m below the present ground surface. As described above, these sites may lie on a levee, suggesting that the Roman ground surface should fall away to the north, and this does appear to be seen at Hastings and Clarke’s Two Acres. Periodic inundation, represented by intercalated alluvium and occupation, is evident at a number of sites, including Huish and Burnham Brewery. All of these sites appear to have been involved in salt production. Leech (1977a, 38–9) has described a typology of briquetage, with various forms of evaporating vessels, salt moulds (?), bars, and tiles. Only definite primary production sites have so far produced this full range of briquetage artefacts, such as the Burnham Brewery site. The one exceptional site appears to have been Hastings, where the well-constructed floor and finds assemblage suggest a slightly higher status settlement. An additional activity is that of iron working, for
slag was found at Hastings and Huish (Nash letter 26.x.69). Slag was also found at the Lakehouse Farm site.

The landscape north of the Siger was totally different. A number of substantial stone buildings must have been in flood-free landscape, implying that the coastline and tidal rivers were protected by natural and/or man-made barriers. There must also have been a system of drainage ditches and sluice gates through which freshwater run-off was discharged into the tidal rivers at low tide. Such major Roman drainage schemes are known elsewhere, notably on the Welsh side of the Severn Estuary, where Roman legionary involvement is suspected (Fulford et al. 1994). There is no evidence of who was responsible in Somerset, though a clear decision had been taken concerning how the landscape was to be managed and exploited. To the south of the Siger, salt was the priority and grazing could only have been seasonal. To the north of the Siger, these resources were sacrificed in order to drain the land, to provide improved pasture or even arable land. However, the flood defences failed, and these landscapes now lie under more than 0.5 m of alluvium; it is only because of the careful fieldwork of Sam Nash that the landscape's complexities have emerged.

APPENDICES: THE LEGACY OF SAM NASH

Sam Nash was a meticulous recorder of all his research. His records, which have been deposited in various locations, provide a rich resource for archaeologists and historians. In this paper and elsewhere (Rippon 1991; 1993; 1994; 1997) I have only been able to touch upon the wealth of information that Nash has left us. Appendix 1 contains a chronology of Nash's major excavations and observations. Appendices 2–4 provide lists of his publicly-available archives, brief notes on their contents, and where they can be found. Nash’s important series of letters to Stephen Dewar (items from which are referred to in this paper as ‘Nash letter’) are held by his daughter Mary Kempson.

APPENDIX 1: CHRONOLOGY OF MAJOR EXCAVATIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

Nash’s letters and archives show that he visited over 212 sites (Rippon 1993, Appendix 2A). The major sites and discoveries are listed chronologically below.

1957: observations and excavations at the Bristol Bridge Clay Pit (Nash May 1976).


Spring 1963: starts excavations by his own house, ‘Huish’ (Sandyway Farm) in Highbridge (Nash letters 19.iv.64; 24.xi.67). The first deep excavation was in 1969 (Nash letters 7.ix.69; 15.x.69; 20.x.9; 26.x.69).


Autumn 1964: observes Roman briquetage mound in the side of the Huntspill River at Newbridge (Nash letters 29.ix.64; 8.xi.64).

Jan. 1965: observes several more briquetage mounds in the side of the Huntspill River between Woolavington Bridge and Gold Corner (Nash letter 3.i.65).
May 1965: observes development of the Hollimarine complex to south of Burnham, which yields virtually no archaeological material, apart from Roman and medieval sites to the extreme eastern edge near the site of the Burnham Brewery (Nash letter 9.v.65).

May 1965: building site to the east of Burnham Lighthouse reveals substantial sand-filled palaeo-channel on the line of the documented River Siger (Nash letter 9.v.65).

May 1965: small excavation at Berrow church reveals 14th century material under 4 ft [1.2 m] of sand (Nash letter 9.v.65).

Sep. 1966: surveys earthworks of moated site at Walrow (Nash letter 2.x.66).

April 1967: grip digging reveals a c. 4 acre Roman site on playing fields to the west of King Alfred's School (Nash letter 11.iv.67).


Nov. 1969: discovers Roman occupation deposit 40 ft [12 m] across near the Burnham Brewery (Nash letter 2.xi.69).


1970: observations along the line of the M5 motorway.

April–July 1971: excavations in Berrow churchyard (Nash letters 13.iv.71; 23.v.71; 6.vi.71). In November he observed a sandcliff created during earthmoving, with a wall under 20 ft [6.1 m] of sand (Nash letter 27.xi.71).


April 1972: briquetage mound recorded during drain cutting along Worston Lane (Nash letter 4.iv.72).


APPENDIX 2: NASH’S ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDS

BURNHAM PUBLIC LIBRARY

Manuscript Files
E.69: ‘Excavations and Materials’. Includes typescript reports (see below), and a manuscript list of every site in Burnham to have produced medieval or post-medieval material, along with a copy of a letter dated Oct. 1972 regarding ‘Twenty Six Medieval Sites in the Burnham Area’.

F.108: ‘Roman Sedgemoor’. Includes notes of a visit to briquetage mounds, a series of stratigraphic sections (from Shapwick, Combwich, Bristol Bridge, Apex Clay Pit, Berrow, and South Brent), a manuscript list of sites from which Roman material has been found (including a map), and several letters from G. Boon regarding the date of pottery from several sites.

Site Notes
The following files contain Nash’s original site notes on a series of major excavations. Each has a full typescript report in file E69 and/or at Somerset County Museum (see below) E.111: Hastings; E.112: Burnham Brewery; E.113: Old Walls; E.114: Parsonage; E.117: Huish House.
Typescript Reports

In addition to the two manuscript lists, of Roman (in File F108) and medieval and post-medieval material from Burnham parish (in File E69), there are several typescript reports.

Feb. 1975: ‘Notes on the Coastal Area of the Middle Moor of Somerset. Evidence for the Former Existence of a deep Water Channel at Highbridge’ (Paper deposited with Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society, Taunton; appears to be the only copy. For published summary see Nash 1972–3.)

Feb. 1975: ‘List of Locations of Romano-British (and Early Iron Age) material, mainly from the Middle Moor of Somerset, 1957 to 1972’. Notes on a large number of findspots.

April 1975: ‘Medieval and Post Medieval Material from Various Locations on or Adjoining the Middle Moor of Somerset (but Excluding Burnham and Highbridge)’.

Sept. 1975: ‘Minor Locations in Burnham/Highbridge from which Medieval/Post-Medieval Material has been Recovered’. (The manuscript paper in E69 gives far more sites; the typescript paper describes only that material retained and deposited at Somerset County Museum.)

The following files at Burnham Library also have archaeological material. B20: includes Edithmead (Newspaper cutting); E42: includes Hastings (Newspaper cutting); E91: file titled ‘Geology of the Somerset Levels’, including some archaeology.

SOMERSET COUNTY MUSEUM

The original typescript reports on Nash’s main excavations are at the Somerset County Museum, complete with illustrations, and in some cases photographs. Copies of the reports, except Burnham Brewery, are in File E69 at Burnham Library but lack illustrations. Some copies are also in Somerset County Council’s Sites and Monuments Record (SMR).


Oct. 1975: ‘Notes Concerning 2 Medieval Sites on the North Side of Fairford Road, Highbridge’.

1976: ‘Notes on a Medieval Site on a Plot of Ground Called Parsonage, Burnham-On-Sea’.


July 1978: ‘Huish, Old Burnham Road, Highbridge’.

APPENDIX 3: NASH’S REPORTS RELATING TO THE M5 MOTORWAY

All the reports are from copies made by Dr Roger Leech, now deposited in Somerset County Museum, Taunton.

Nash Typescript Report: describes the site at Edingworth York Farm and the M5/A38 Junction; it includes a sketch plan and section.

Nash First Report: Leech’s manuscript notes, on a manuscript report written by Nash for the M5 Research Committee; there are no accompanying plans or sections amongst Leech’s notes. Relates to sites at Lakehouse Farm.
Nash Second Report: as above, but dealing with sites 1A to 7.

Nash Third Report: as above, but dealing with sites 8 and 9.

APPENDIX 4: NOTES RELATING TO DOCUMENTARY RESEARCH

Nash carried out detailed research into the parish of Burnham, and the surrounding areas. Almost all of this remains unpublished, apart from a brief note on 'Old Auster' tenure (Nash 1974). Nash's archives were deposited at Burnham Public Library, where they fill two filing cabinets. What follows is intended as a rough guide to this great local history resource.

There are 83 files of bound loose-leaf manuscript notes. The majority are transcripts and analysis of post-medieval sources, relating to Burnham parish. A detailed list has been compiled by V.J. Wrigley (copy at Burnham Library); what follows is a thematic summary.

Parish registers: A1–6
Waywardens accounts: A7–8, E62
Church rates: A9–10, A63
Poor rates: A11–12, A64
Miscellaneous church records: A13
Tithes/Assessments: A30–31, E32, E58, E79–81
Families: C46–56
Miscellaneous references in chronological order: A20–29, F109–10
Drainage/sea-walls: B26, E14, E17, E67a, E91
Old Austers: E77–8
Huish: E117a–b (and other material scattered in above files)

Many other parishes have files, with material arranged roughly in chronological order. This material tends to be transcripts from published primary material such as the Glastonbury archives.

Berrow and Brean: D38, D45
Brent: D36–37
Glastonbury: E59
Huntspill: D33–4, D44
Mark: D35, D45
Pawlett: D40, D45
Puriton: D45
Wells: E60

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper could not have been written without the help of all those whole kindly sent information, notably Sam Nash's daughter Mary Kempson. I would also like to thank the following for their assistance in this research: S. Berry (Somerset Record Office), David Bromwich (Somerset Studies Library), Madge Langdon (Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society), Colin Clements, Stephen Minnitt (Somerset County Museum) and Robert Pudner (Burnham Public Library). Roger Leech kindly gave me access to his notes on several of Nash's reports that have since gone astray. Dr Leech also kindly supplied copies of the M5 survey. I would also like to thank Mick Aston for first suggesting that I track down Nash's archives, and his subsequent encouragement with all my research.
Roman Settlement on the Somerset Coast

REFERENCES

The references cited here are supplemented by the sources referred to in the appendices above.


Leech, R., 1977b. ‘Late Iron Age and Romano-British Briquetage Sites at Quarrylands Lane, Budgeworth’, *SANH*, 121, 89–96.


Stradling, W., 1850. ‘Turbaries’, *SANH*, 1, 48–62.


AUTHOR

Dr Stephen Rippon, Department of History and Archaeology, University of Exeter, Queen’s Building, The Queen’s Drive, Exeter, EX4 4QH.