2-4 Northcroft Lane
Newbury
West Berkshire

Archaeological
Watching Brief Report

Oxford Archaeology
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Prepared by: Mike Sims
Position: Small Works Supervisor
Date: 28th November 2003

Checked by: Andrew Holmes
Position: Contracts Officer
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Approved by: Nick Shepherd
Position: Head of Fieldwork
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Signed: 

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Oxford Archaeology
© Oxford Archaeological Unit Ltd 2003
Jama House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES
t: (0044) 01865 263800
e: info@oxfordarch.co.uk
f: (0044) 01865 793496
w: www.oxfordarch.co.uk

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

Between July and November 2003 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at 2-4 Northcroft Lane, Newbury, West Berkshire, (NGR: SU 470 672). The work was commissioned by John Clark Associates in advance of construction of three dwellings and the conversion of the former Alms House on the site. The watching brief revealed 19th and 20th century demolition layers overlying alluvial deposits, of which only the upper layer showed any evidence of activity. No evidence for any archaeology earlier than the 19th century was observed.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 Between July and November 2003 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at No. 2 Northcroft Lane, Newbury, West Berkshire (NGR SU 470 672). A Level 2 building record was also undertaken by OA at No. 4 Northcroft Lane (forthcoming) in advance of the conversion works to be carried out on the former Alms House (Fig. 2). The work was commissioned by John Clark Associates in respect of a planning application for construction of three new “Town Houses” and conversion of the grade II listed former Alms House (Planning Application No. 02/02116/LBC).

1.1.2 A project brief was set by Veronica Fiorato, Principal Archaeological Officer for West Berkshire Council, in line with PPG 16 and Local Plan policies.

1.1.3 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief, which was approved by the Principal Archaeological Officer prior to intrusive works starting on site.

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The site lies on at approximately 76 m above OD. The site is situated on the north side of Northcroft Lane, adjacent to the River Kennet (Fig. 1) and is approximately 20 m x 20 m in area. The underlying geology is alluvium overlying river gravel.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 An archaeological background to the site was prepared for the WSI (OA, 2003) and is summarised below.

1.3.2 The site is located within the medieval historic core of Newbury. Astill, in his Historic Towns of Berkshire: an Archaeological Appraisal (1978), identifies this area of the town as being of archaeological interest in having the potential to elucidate the medieval and post-medieval development of the settlement and specifically to assist in the understanding of the town’s burgage plots. These are the narrow plots of land running back from the main streets at right angles, which were laid out early in the life of the town.
1.3.3 No. 4 Northcroft Lane is a grade II listed building and former almshouse erected in 1821. It is a red brick building, two storeys tall with a hipped roof, and is constructed in a Gothic style. An inscription over the doorway shows that it was erected by Mr. John Childs, a sailcloth manufacturer, 'for poor men of good moral character, natives and parishioners of Newbury' (Victoria County History, 1972).

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 To preserve by record any archaeological remains (if present) that the development may remove or damage during site preparation, the excavation of ground beams, pile caps and any additional services.

2.1.2 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 All excavations within the defined area of 2-4 Northcroft Lane, whether by hand digging or by machine were undertaken in the presence of a qualified archaeologist.

2.2.2 The extent of these excavations (Fig. 2), and their locations was planned at a scale of 1:50. A number of representative sections, as well as those of specific interest, were drawn at a scale of 1:20, with their locations recorded on the main plans. These sections were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was also made.

2.2.3 Use was made of the architect's plans as well as offsetting from standing buildings to survey the site. An optical level was used to record levels.


3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

3.1.1 The primary deposit located within the sequence (Fig. 3, section 3) was a dark grey silty clay (104). This was a fine deposit with no inclusions, whose full depth was not exposed. A sequence of laminated alluvial deposits (103) overlay the thick clay (104). Layer 103 was a tenacious olive green silty clay alluvium containing a large amount of flint gravel.

3.1.2 These alluvial deposits (103 and 104) were sealed by a tenacious olive yellow silty clay (102), which was very clean with no observable finds. This in turn was overlain by a friable clay silt alluvium (101), which produced large amounts of fragmented and abraded ceramic building material dating to the 19th and 20th century (Fig. 3, section 3). This context may have been part of the foreshore or bank of the River Kennet before being reclaimed for development.
Figure 1: Site location