Beechcroft Developments Limited

Thames Bank, Goring, Oxon

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

SU 597 819

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

March 1998
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Thames Bank, Goring, Oxon

Archaeological Evaluation Report

SUMMARY

The Oxford Archaeological Unit undertook a field evaluation at Thames Bank, Goring on behalf of Beechcroft Developments Ltd on the 26th and 27th of February 1998. The evaluation revealed that the site was extensively landscaped prior to, and possibly in association with, the construction of the present building, now partially demolished. The footings of the building were found to be constructed directly on top of the natural chalk, and the ground level had subsequently been made up to a height of some 1.4m above the natural chalk. To the south of the site a thin layer of sand was encountered, surviving beneath the made ground deposits. A ditch, aligned approximately east-west cut from the top of this sand, was dated by a single sherd of pottery to the Early or Middle Saxon period.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

In February 1998 the Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a field evaluation at Thames Bank, Goring on behalf of Beechcroft Developments Limited in respect of a planning application for residential development (Fig.1) and Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) agreed with Paul Smith, County Archaeological Officer for Oxfordshire. The development site lay on the East bank of the River Thames and is c.0.87 hectares in area.

1.2 Geology and topography

The site lies on Middle Chalk geology (Geological Survey Sheet BGS 254) at 45m above Ordnance Datum. Since the site is situated on the East bank of the River Thames, it was anticipated that alluvial clay deposits might exist, but none were encountered during this investigation. The evaluation area is at present undergoing demolition and construction, but was formerly a residential home for the elderly.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

The site itself has produced limited archaeological evidence and there are no known sites with archaeological finds adjacent to the development site. However, archaeological deposits and finds are common within the Thames Floodplain area.

(i) The nearest find was a single flint flake (possibly Neolithic) discovered in the garden of 3 Nun’s Acre (Oxon SMR PRN 7656).

(ii) To the south-east of the site, at Gatehampton Farm (Allen 1995), excavation by the OAU in advance of pipe-laying has revealed evidence of occupation from the early postglacial period to the Bronze Age and again in the Roman and Saxon periods. This includes evidence of a pagan Saxon Grubenhäuser and a midden which suggests that the Saxon settlement was extensive.
2 EVALUATION AIMS

The general aims of the evaluation, as stated in the WSI, were as follows:

To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the development area.

To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present.

To establish the ecofactual/environmental potential of archaeological features.

To make available the results of the investigation.
3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sample size and scope of fieldwork

The evaluation consisted of two trenches (Fig.2). Trench 1 was located in the area of the proposed car park, outside the original cellared area. It measured 2m wide and was extended from 10m to 12m long to facilitate understanding of the deposits (Fig. 3). Trench 2 was positioned in the area of the proposed car park access ramp and measured 5m long and 2m wide (Fig. 4).

The overburden was removed using a mechanical excavator (JCB) with a toothless ditching bucket under close archaeological supervision. Where possible, the trenches were excavated down to the natural chalk subsoil to allow for the full impact of the development to be examined. Trenches 1 and 2 were machined to maximum depths of 1.55m and 1.48m respectively.

3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

The trenches were cleaned by hand and the revealed feature was sampled to determine the extent and nature, and to retrieve finds and an environmental sample. Both trenches were planned at scales of 1:50 and where necessary their sections drawn at scales of 1:20. The trenches were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures laid down in the OAU Fieldwork Manual (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

3.3 Finds

All deposits were examined for the presence of finds.

3.4 Environmental data

An environmental sample was recovered from the Ditch 203 in Trench 2, for the analysis of any surviving environmental indicators and for the retrieval of small artefacts.

4 RESULTS: GENERAL

4.1 Soils and ground conditions

The deposits encountered mainly consisted of mixed and well-drained largely calcareous made ground. Ground conditions were dry with no preservation of waterlogged materials.

4.2 Distribution of Archaeological Deposits

The only significant archaeological deposits were observed in Trench 2: A thin layer of sand survived under the made ground, through which a ditch, aligned approximately east-west, had been cut. These deposits were sealed under a layer of garden soil. The ditch contained a single sherd of pottery dated to the Early or Middle Saxon period, which was recovered during environmental processing.

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4.3 Presentation of Results

Section 5 includes individual context descriptions by trench. Archaeological deposits and features are described from earliest to latest in each trench. Context information is summarised in the context inventory (Appendix 1).

5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

5.1 Description of deposits

5.1.1 Trench 1 (Fig. 3)

Natural weathered chalk (107) was reached at the south end of Trench 1 at 43.93m OD. This was overlain directly in the northern 10m of the trench by the recently demolished building: This comprised a foundation (102), which was visible in section, and footings (101) which were visible in both section and plan. Part of the original cellared area was revealed in the northernmost 1.5m of the trench. A layer of silt (106) and a later wall (108), were visible in plan in the interior of 101. Mixed rubble and chalk dumping/levelling deposits (103 -105) 1.38m thick, overlay the natural chalk and abutted the outside of 101 and 102, making the ground up to the present level. The footings of the building (101) had been filled with rubble (100) during the recent demolition of part of the building.

5.1.2 Trench 2 (Fig. 4)

Natural weathered chalk (200) was reached in the southern part of Trench 2 at 44.38m OD. In the northern end of the trench the level of the chalk was some 0.44m lower and here it was overlain by a layer of sterile sand (201). Both the natural chalk (200) and sand layer (201) were cut by a ditch (203) which ran almost at right angles to the trench.

Ditch 203 was 2.3m wide and survived to a maximum depth of 0.9m. It had an ‘ankle-breaker’ profile, with shallow sides and an almost square slot at the bottom. It contained three sand and silt fills (202, 204 and 205) of which 204, the secondary fill, yielded a single sherd of pottery (through sampling) dated to the Early or Middle Saxon period. Ditch 203 was sealed by a layer of garden soil (206).

Mixed rubble and soil dumping/levelling deposits (207 -211), similar to those in Trench 1 (103 -105) but less thick (0.54m - 0.64m), overlay 206 and were sealed beneath gravel (212, 213) and modern tarmacadim (214).

5.2 Finds

No finds were recovered during the evaluation, although modern brick and tile were observed. A single abraded sherd of pottery only 20mm across was recovered from the environmental sample taken from the secondary fill (204) of Ditch 203 in Trench 2. This has been dated to the Early or Middle Saxon period.

5.3 Environmental data

A summary of the environmental data recovered during the evaluation is contained in Appendix 2. A small quantity comminuted charcoal and several charred cereal grains together with a limited snail assemblage was noted in the sample taken from Ditch 203.

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6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 Reliability of field investigation

The sample size was sufficient to determine the extent and type of deposits on the site liable to be affected by the proposed development.

6.2 Overall interpretation

6.2.1 Summary of Results

The evaluation revealed a ditch, aligned approximately on an east-west axis, which contained a single sherd of pottery dated to the Early or Middle Saxon period.

The remaining deposits recorded on the site are of the same date or later than the present building.

6.2.2 Significance

The majority of the deposits encountered on the site are of limited archaeological interest. It would appear that the area has been landscaped to the level of natural chalk before, and possibly in connection with, the construction of the present building.

The ditch recorded in Trench 2 would be of local and regional significance if it proved to be of a Saxon date. However, the single sherd of Early or Middle Saxon pottery recovered from the ditch is of insufficient size to positively date the feature and could be considered to be residual.

Bibliography and references

Wilkinson, D (ed) 1992  
*Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual*, (First edition, August 1992)

Allen, T G 1995  
*Oxford Archaeological Unit Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph No. 7*
## Appendix 1  Archaeological Context Inventory

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<th>Ctxt</th>
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Appendix 2  Assessment of environmental indicators
by Dana Challinor and Elizabeth Stafford

Introduction
A single sample from the secondary of three fills (context 204) in a linear ditch was taken for
the assessment of environmental indicators. The total volume processed was 30 litres.

Methods
The sample was processed by mechanical flotation in a modified Siraf machine with the sample
held on a 500um mesh and the flot collected on a 25um mesh. The course residue was then
sieved for small bones and artefacts.

Flots were first put through a stack of sieves, ranging from 500um to 4mm to separate the flot
into manageable fractions. Each fraction was then scanned under a binocular microscope at
x10 to x 20 magnification.

Results
The flot was small in size and consisted principally of modern roots and molluscs.

Charred Remains
Charred remains were very poor, in both quality and quantity. A small amount of very
commiminated charcoal and several of cereal grain fragments were present. No charred weed
seeds were noted.

Bone
No bone was recovered from the sample.

Molluscs
The molluscan assemblage was not rich, but those snails present were well-preserved.
Assessment of the flot revealed a predominance of open country species such as Vallonia
Costata, Vallonia excentrica and Pupilla musorum. Trichia hispida and Cochlilcopa species
were abundant but neither are particularly diagnostic of shaded or unshaded habitats.

Discussion
Given the poor preservation of charred plant remains in this sample further work would not be
recommended.
Fig 1: Site Location