1 High Street, Maidenhead, Berkshire

An Archaeological Evaluation
for Chesterton Commercial Holdings

By Simon Cass
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code 1HSM06/110

December 2006
Summary

Site name: 1 High Street, Maidenhead, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 89080 81200

Site activity: Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 17th–21st November 2006

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Simon Cass

Site code: 1HSM06/110

Area of site: 630 sq m

Summary of results: Two trenches were dug, one of which revealed only modern disturbance. The other trench revealed a line of preserved wooden stakes at a considerable depth which probably reveted a palaeochannel. No dating evidence for the revetment was recovered though a medieval or early post-medieval date seems likely. A single sherd of early post-medieval pottery was recovered from overlying layers

Monuments identified: Timber revetment

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Reading Museum.

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford✓ 13.12.06
Steve Preston✓ 13.12.06
Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at 1 High Street, Maidenhead, Berkshire (SU 89080 81200) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Chris Owens of Owens Galliver Architects, 10 High Street, Pangbourne, Berkshire, RG8 7AB on behalf of Chesterton Commercial Holdings, Hooks Farm, Henley Road, Marlow, SL7 2DS.

Planning permission has been gained on appeal (APP/T0355/A/06/2008797) from the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead for the construction of a new restaurant and apartments. The consent is subject to a condition (23) relating to archaeology.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment’s Planning Policy Guidance, Archaeology and Planning (PPG16 1990), and the Council’s policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Mike Lang Hall, archaeological consultant with Berkshire Archaeology, archaeological advisers to the Royal Borough. The fieldwork was undertaken by Simon Cass, David Platt and Steve Ford, between the 17th and 21st November 2006 and the site code is 1HSM06/110. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Reading Museum in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on the south of the High Street but is accessed from St Ives Road (Fig. 2). To the east is York Stream. The site is currently fairly level open ground and lies slightly below the height of the High Street which rises slightly as it crosses Chapel Arches. The underlying geology is mapped as river gravel (BGS 1974) but with alluvium close by to the east. Sandy gravel was encountered in both trenches but at some depth in trench 2 buried beneath a complex of alluvial deposits. The site lies at a height of approximately 24m above Ordnance Datum.
Archaeological background

The site is located within the Thames Valley, an archaeologically rich area, which is relatively well known from a variety of sources (Ford 1987). Many of the archaeological sites of the valley have been recorded from the air (Gates 1975) as well as numerous stray finds, both prehistoric and later, of flint, bronze and iron retrieved from the Thames (e.g., Chappell 1987). Further finds have been recorded during fieldwork carried out in advance of mineral extraction (Barnes and Cleal 1991) and other fieldwork carried out as part of planning process (Foreman et al. 2002).

The site’s archaeological potential stems from its location within the historic core of Maidenhead. The town is considered to have Saxon origins and is recorded in Domesday Book in 1086 as Ellintone (Elentone/Aylington) but was probably no more than a hamlet or village at this time, until a bridge crossing the Thames was built in 1280. The name Maidenhead (Maydeheth:Maydenheth) is first recorded in 1296 (VCH 1972). The timber bridge, which was rebuilt in 1423, and replaced in stone in 1772-7, became the principal crossing point for people travelling between London and Bristol and provided the stimulus for Maidenhead’s growth in the medieval period (Astill 1978). The site lies on the fringes of what was thought to be the medieval extent of the town and within a zone developed in early post-medieval times (Astill 1978, fig. 16) but a recent watching brief immediately adjacent to the site located medieval deposits (Cass and Pine 2003). The medieval town developed along the High Street but Astill suggests it did not extend over the lower lands to the Bridge and this may have been a deliberate policy due to the flooding potential of these low lying areas. Evaluation at 50-70 Moorbridge Road (SMR 15573) to the east of the site located buried soils containing post-medieval finds of clay pipes, pottery and tile.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the area of development.

Specific aims of the project were;

To determine if archaeologically relevant levels have survived on the site.

To determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present.

To determine if archaeological deposits representing Medieval occupation of the site are present.
Results

Two trenches 1.6m wide were excavated using a JCB-type machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision (Fig. 3). All were dug as near as possible to their intended positions, although the presence of live services, and access problems resulted in some adjustment to position and length. This was in consultation with the monitor. Spoilheaps were searched for finds.

A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

Trench 1
This trench was 11.0m long and 1.3m deep aligned north–south. The stratigraphy comprised modern demolition rubble above modern made ground above natural sand and gravel (at 23.08m AOD). A single pit of 19th century or later date containing transfer printed pottery cut the gravel. Otherwise no archaeological deposits were observed nor finds recovered from the spoilheaps.

Trench 2 (Plates 1 and 2)
This trench was 8.7m long and 2.6m deep aligned south west - north east. The stratigraphy comprised topsoil above fairly recent made ground above a humic layer interpreted as a buried topsoil (50). Beneath this were layers of silt with gravel variously comprising grey/black sandy silt with varying levels of organic inclusions (51–54). Below this at a depth of 2.6m (21.26m AOD) was a sandy gravel which was the natural geology.

The full extent of this trench could not be dug to natural geology due to the presence of a live sewer at the south-west end.

Traversing the base of the trench aligned north-south was an irregular row of 12 wooden stakes (or posts) penetrating layer 54 and the gravel [Plate 2]. The stakes were 0.04–0.1m in diameter and survived to a height of up to 0.4m above the gravel, with an impression of stake 1 in the section indicating former survival for a further 0.1m higher (Fig. 4). A piece of one of the stakes (7) was sampled and shown to be made from oak. There was no trace of any wattling and it seems most likely that the stakes were driven in after layer 54 had formed and that the exposed pieces were never intended to be above the contemporary ground level.

The lower stratigraphy (53) of section 1 to the west of the stake line indicates sloping fills with a high humic content. This suggests that the stake line was intended to revet the eastern side of a channel. Samples of the lower layers of the trench were taken for palaeo-environmental assessment and perhaps it is significant for the interpretation of layer 53 representing a channel infill, that it produced an abundance of sedge remains with
other water loving species present, where as the overlying layer (52) and the layer immediately above the gravel (54) and cut by the suggested channel contained no such remains.

Few datable finds were recovered from this trench other than modern material in the made ground. These comprised a single sherd of early post-medieval pottery and a few fragments of brick/tile from layer 51, and a tile fragment from layer 52.

**Finds**

**Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn**

A single sherd of pottery occurred in context 51, Trench 2. It is a sherd of Surrey/Hampshire ‘Tudor Green’ (Pearce and Vince 1988, 79-81 and figs 126-7), weighing 4g, and is most likely to be 15th – 16th century in date. It is from the rim of a lobed cup, a common vessel type in this fabric.

**Assessment of environmental samples by Lucy Cramp**

Three samples of sediment were taken from waterlogged deposits at the base of trench 2. These samples were floated over a 0.2mm mesh and sorted whilst wet under a low-power binocular microscope at x10-x20 magnification in order to assess their potential as sources of palaeoenvironmental information. A single piece of waterlogged wood sample from a post was also recovered and retained for species identification.

Only sample 2 (from context 53) contained identifiable plant material (Appendix 2). Sedge (*Carex* sp.), a wetland plant, was the most abundant plant to be represented. Seeds of *Myosoton aquaticum*, which grows on damp and disturbed soils, and fat hen (*Chenopodium album*) which also grows in disturbed, but drier habitats were also present. A single seed of alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), which is again common to damper habitats, indicates nearby shrubs. This assemblage is therefore consistent with disturbed ground in the environs of a river or ditch.

The piece of wood from stake 7 was oak (*Quercus* sp.).

A fragment of mussel shell was recovered from context 53.

**Conclusion**

This small evaluation has revealed deposits of archaeological interest. The lowest levels of trench 2 contained a line of timbers considered to be the remains of a revetment for a stream channel located to the west. No dating evidence was recovered for the revetment, although a medieval or post-medieval date seems likely. The
immediately overlying layer (former topsoil buried by late post-medieval made ground) produced a single sherd of early post-medieval medieval pottery. Trench 1 revealed no remains of archaeological interest.

The surviving parts of the revetment in trench 2 were located at considerable depth (2.6m) where they cut into the natural gravel. The depth of the latter contrasts with the level of the gravel in trench 1 just to the north and when taken in conjunction with the earlier watching brief observations just to the north-west of the site (Cass and Pine 2005) suggest the presence of an infilled palaeochannel.

Due to the waterlogged nature of the base of trench 2 which led to preservation of the wooden stakes for the revetment, samples of surrounding sediments also indicated preservation of other plant material though the species range observed was surprisingly restricted. The species recovered indicated the presence of a predominantly aquatic environment.

References

Cass, S and Pine, J, 2006, 3 High Street, Maidenhead Berkshire, an archaeological watching brief, Thames Valley Archaeological Services report 05/21, Reading
Chappell, S, 1987, Stone Axe Morphology and Distribution in Neolithic Britain, BAR Ser 177, Oxford
Foreman, S, Hiller, J and Petts, D, 2002, Gathering the people and settling the land; the archaeology of the middle Thames landscape, Anglo-Saxon to post medieval, Oxford Archaeol monogr, 14, Oxford
Gates, T, 1975, The Thames Valley; An archaeological Survey of the River Gravels, Berkshire Archaeol Comm Pubn 1, Reading
### APPENDIX 1: Trench details

0m at S or W end

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trench</th>
<th>Length (m)</th>
<th>Breadth (m)</th>
<th>Depth (m)</th>
<th>Comment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>0.00m-0.9m Demolition rubble; 0.9-1.3m modern made ground; 1.3m+ sandy gravel natural geology. Modern pit at 4m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.70</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>2.6m</td>
<td>0.00m-0.25m topsoil; 0.25m-0.70m modern made ground; 0.70-1.4m buried topsoil (50); 1.4-1.8m grey/black sandy silt (51); 1.8-2.2m grey sandy silt with gravel (52); 2.2-2.6m grey/black silty humic deposits (53-54); 2.6m+ sandy gravel natural geology. Row of at least 12 stakes penetrating layer 54 and the gravel. Sewer at SW end [Plates 1 and 2]</td>
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</table>
**APPENDIX 2: Environmental Samples**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Sample volume (L)</th>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Abundance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>No identifiable material</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Carex sp.</td>
<td>sedge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cf. <em>Myosoton aquaticum</em></td>
<td>water chickweed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Chenopodium album</em></td>
<td>fat hen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Alnus glutinosa</em></td>
<td>alder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No identifiable material</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ &lt;5</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>&lt;10</td>
<td>+++ &gt;10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1 High Street, Maidenhead, Berkshire, 2006
An archaeological evaluation

Figure 1. Location of site within Maidenhead and Berkshire.

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Figure 2. Detailed location of site in Maidenhead.
Figure 3. Location of trenches.
Figure 4. Plan and section of trench 2.
Plate 1. Trench 2, Looking north, Scales: 1m and 2m.

Plate 2. Trench 2 looking west, Horizontal scale: 1m