New Swimming Pool, Abingdon School, Wootton Road, Abingdon, Oxfordshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For Abingdon School

by Steve Ford
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code ASA07/08

July 2007
Summary

Site name: New Swimming Pool, Abingdon School, Wootton Road, Abingdon, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SU 4939 9751

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 18th–19th June 2007

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Steve Ford

Site code: ASA07/08

Summary of results: A large proportion of the area of the proposed new swimming pool had been truncated by probable quarries of 19th- or 20th-century date. A late post-medieval (19th- or 20th-century) pit was also observed

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

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Preston 15.08.07
Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out during construction of a new swimming pool at Abingdon School, Wootton Road, Abingdon, Oxfordshire (SU 4939 9751) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Graham Clarkson of The Clarkson Alliance, Cranbrook House, 291 Banbury Road, Oxford, OX2 7JA on behalf of Abingdon School.

Planning consent (ABG/6743/13) has been granted by Vale of White Horse District Council to demolish existing changing rooms and an open air swimming pool and construct a new pool, and additional sports facilities. This consent is subject to a condition relating to archaeology requiring the implementation of a programme of archaeological works in the form of an archaeological watching brief during groundworks.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment’s Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the District Council’s policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Hugh Coddington, of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service, advisers to the District. The fieldwork was undertaken by Steve Ford on 18th and 19th June 2007 and the site code is ASA 07/08.

The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The school is located on the northern margins of the town centre of Abingdon. The development site lies on the eastern side of the school adjacent to Wootton Road (Fig. 2). The ground is level at a height of c.80m above Ordnance Datum. The underlying geology is described as Second Terrace river gravel (BGS 1971) which was observed on site.

Archaeological background

The site lies just beyond what is considered to be the northern limit of the historic (medieval) core of Abingdon and subsequent early post-medieval expansion (Munby et al. 1975, map 2). The archaeology of Abingdon is best
known for its association with the Abbey, which in its time was one of the richest establishments in the country. However, archaeological work has revealed the presence of extensive Roman remains beneath the later Saxon and medieval town and almost certainly indicates the presence of a Roman town (Allen 1991). A number of findspots of Roman date have been recorded to the south of the school site. Of more significance is the finding of inhumation burials immediately to the south of the new sports complex. These comprised a child skull possibly from a cist and a male inhumation burial of Roman or possibly Saxon date (Evans and Excell 1997; 2000).

**Objectives and methodology**

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the groundworks. This was primarily to observe overburden removal to expose the upper surface of the natural geology for the new swimming pool area. Other adjacent areas of deep ground works were also to be monitored.

**Results**

*The swimming pool*

Following demolition of the old changing rooms and removal of superficial areas of made ground, the footprint of the new swimming pool was stripped to expose the top of the natural geology. This was predominantly a limestone gravel but with some orange clay patches present. Removal of the overburden was carried by a 360° machine fitted with a ditching bucket under archaeological supervision (Figs 2 and 3). Typically 1.35m of made ground was removed at the northern end of the site (where the former changing rooms stood) with 0.8m of topsoil/subsoil towards the southern end.

At the northern end the foundations for the former changing rooms were still extant and cut into the natural geology (Fig. 3). In some places more extensive modern disturbance had taken place. For other parts of the stripped area, the natural geology was truncated by very large pits, or quarry holes. Four of these were examined and found to contain relatively modern items (but not in large numbers) such as clay pipe fragments, wood, brick/tile fragments and in one instance a metal item (an old trowel). Only relatively small areas of the natural geology were undisturbed. On the north-eastern side of the site another large pit was partially exposed and contained brick/tile, four sherds of late post-medieval pottery (brown glazed post-medieval redware) and fragments of coal. Close by a modern brick-built soakaway was observed.

Apart from these Victorian or later truncations no deposits or artefacts of archaeological interest were observed.
**Foundation trenches**

A small number of deep interventions were observed elsewhere on the site (Fig. 3). Several foundation trenches on the north eastern portion of the site were dug but collapsed shortly afterwards. A trench adjacent to the school boundary wall was 0.6m wide and 2.2m deep and revealed about 1m of made ground above the natural geology. Other trenches in this area only revealed the presence of the backfilled former swimming pool. No deposits or artefacts of archaeological interest were observed in this part of the site.

**Finds**

Only relatively modern items such as clay pipe, brick and tile and late post-medieval pottery were observed. These were retained on site.

**Conclusion**

Much of the archaeologically relevant horizon, perhaps as much as 50% of the site area, had been truncated by 19th- or early 20th-century activity thus removing any earlier deposits. Over the remaining untruncated areas no deposits of archaeological interest were observed. It was also noted that almost no artefacts such as pottery were revealed in either the stripped overburden or the backfill of the quarry pits which also suggests that there were never any archaeological deposits in this area.

**References**

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Figure 1. Location of site within Abingdon and Oxfordshire.

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Figure 2. Detailed location of site within Abingdon.

Scale: 1:2500
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Figure 3. Detailed location of watching brief areas.

Scale: 1:250