Summary

Site name: South Abingdon Community Centre

Grid reference: SU 4872 9638

Site activity: Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 30th October 2001

Project manager: Helen Moore

Site supervisor: Helen Moore

Site code: DRA 01/95

Area of site: 0.156 ha

Summary of results: No archaeological remains were recorded from either of the two trenches, and no deposits with palaeoenvironmental potential were observed.

Monuments identified: None

Location and reference of archive: The site archive is presently held by Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd, 47-49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5NR. The archive will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course.

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South Abingdon Community Centre, Drayton Road, Abingdon, Oxfordshire
An Archaeological Evaluation

by Helen Moore

Report 01/95

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at South Abingdon Community Centre, Drayton Road, Abingdon, Oxfordshire (SU4872 9638; Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Stuart Binnie of Carless and Adams Partnership, on behalf of Paradigm Housing Group Ltd.

A planning application has been submitted to the Vale of White Horse District Council to construct two houses and twelve flats on this site, which lies on the east side of Drayton Road to the south of the current community centre. Mr Hugh Coddington of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service highlighted the archaeological potential of the site and requested an archaeological evaluation in accordance with the Department of the Environment’s Planning Policy Guidance, Archaeology and Planning (PPG16 1990), and the District policies on archaeology. This was in order to provide information to allow the formulation of plans to mitigate the effects of development on any archaeology that might be present. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Hugh Coddington of Oxfordshire County Archaeology Service. The fieldwork was undertaken by Helen Moore assisted by Stephen Hammond, on 30th October 2001. The site code is DRA01/95. 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 site is located on a 0.156ha parcel of land on the southern edge of Abingdon on the east side of Drayton Road, to the south of the current community centre. It lies on the floor of the valley of the river Ock, which flows to the east where it joins the Thames. The underlying geology is the first floodplain gravel terrace (BGS, 1971). The site lies at 52m above Ordnance Datum. The natural subsoil observed in the trenches was mid grey brown sandy gravel with occasional chalky and clay patches.

Archaeological background

Abingdon and its environs have been a focus of activity during every period of history, and archaeological finds from the area are common. To the east of Abingdon, a Neolithic causewayed enclosure has been found at
Radley, and a linear barrow cemetery dating to the Bronze Age was also constructed in this area. A Bronze Age barrow containing six primary and secondary burials has been excavated just to the east of the site.

Iron Age settlements and field systems are also common, and have been excavated at Ashville Trading Estate (Parrington 1978) to the north of the site. Recent excavations in adjacent areas have revealed further, extensive deposits (H Coddington, pers. comm.). An important late Iron Age settlement also underlies the modern town centre to the east (Allen 1991).

The important Iron Age settlement at Abingdon continued in use into Roman times, with a large Roman settlement continuing to be occupied up to the 5th century AD. To the north-east of the proposal site a Roman settlement has been partially excavated. Rural Roman settlements and field systems have also been found in the environs of Abingdon, and a villa was excavated at Barton Court Farm.

Abingdon was also an important focus for Saxon activity, although the relationship between the latest Roman occupation and the earliest Saxon activity is unclear. Hean, a West Saxon nobleman, founded an abbey here c. AD675 (Blair 1998). To the east of the proposal site an important Saxon cemetery was discovered on Saxton Road during building works. This dated from the 5th to 6th centuries AD and contained some of the earliest grave goods to have been found from a Saxon cemetery in England. Eighty-two cremations and 119 inhumations were excavated in 1934-35, possibly half to two thirds of the estimated area.

The medieval town was dominated by the abbey, one of the most important in the country, and Abingdon still retains most of its medieval plan. The town is not thought to have extended as far as Ock Bridge to the north of the site until the 17th century.

**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. It was agreed that two trenches would be dug, 15m and 20m long respectively, by 1.6m wide. They were to be aligned approximately north-south and east-west. They were to be excavated using a JCB-type machine fitted with a ditching bucket, under continuous archaeological supervision.

**Results**

The two trenches were dug in the positions proposed. The deposits were removed in spits not exceeding 0.10m, and the surface of each spit was examined for archaeological features and finds. A complete list of trenches...
giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

Trench 1 (Plate 1)

This was located in the western area of the site and was aligned slightly NW-SE (Fig. 2). It was 20m long and was 0.53–0.58m deep. Topsoil, composed of a mid grey-brown clayey-silt 0.20m deep, overlay subsoil composed of a mid grey-brown silty clay with moderate angular flints, 0.40m deep. This lay above the natural subsoil revealed at 51.78m–51.59m above Ordnance Datum. It was mid grey-brown sandy gravel with white chalk patches and occasional clay patches. The natural undulated gradually, with deeper pockets of clay. No archaeological features or finds were observed truncating the natural gravels.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was located in the eastern area of the site and aligned NE-SW. It was 15m long and was 0.69m–0.84m deep. Topsoil, which was slightly deeper at this end of the site at 0.28m, overlay a dark grey-brown clayey-silt with occasional charcoal flecks 0.15m deep. This is likely to be a buried topsoil, and it was immediately above a mid grey-brown silty clay subsoil 0.28m deep, with angular flint inclusions. The natural subsoil was encountered at 51.65m AOD and was a mid grey-brown sandy gravel, but with less chalk and more clay patches than in Trench 1. No archaeological features or finds were observed truncating the natural gravels.

Finds

Modern pottery and brick were observed in the topsoil, but not retained.

Conclusion

No archaeological features or finds were recovered from either of the trenches, or from an examination of the spoil heaps. Despite the site’s close proximity to the Saxon cemetery on Saxton Road, it would seem that the boundaries of the cemetery did not extend this far west. The site would appear to have been under agricultural use in the past, until the town of Abingdon expanded in this area during the 20th century and the housing estates and former community centre were constructed.

References

Blair, J, 1998 Anglo Saxon Oxfordshire, Sutton Publishing Limited
APPENDIX 1: Trench details
0m at S or W end

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trench No.</th>
<th>Length (m)</th>
<th>Breadth (m)</th>
<th>Depth (m)</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.53-0.58</td>
<td>0.20m depth of topsoil overlay 0.40m of silty-clay subsoil, which lay immediately above natural, a mid grey-brown sandy gravel. No archaeological features or finds were observed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.69-0.84</td>
<td>Topsoil, 0.28m deep overlay buried topsoil 0.15m deep. This lay immediately above 0.28m of silty clay subsoil, which sat on top of the natural sandy gravels. No archaeological features or finds were observed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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South Abingdon Community Centre, Drayton Road, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, 2001

Figure 1. Location of site within Abingdon and Oxfordshire.

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Figure 2. Location of evaluation trenches
Plate 1: Trench 1 looking west, horizontal scale 2m