Florence House, High Street, Hurley, Berkshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For Mr Michael Waterhouse

by Jo Pine
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code FHH04/52

May 2004
Summary

Site name: Florence House, High Street, Hurley, Berkshire

Site code: FHH04/52

Grid reference: SU 8257 8384

Site activity: Watching brief

Date and duration of project: 25–26th May 2004

Project Manager: Jo Pine

Summary of results: A medieval feature, either a large pit or ditch

Monuments identified: Pit/Ditch

Location and reference of archive: The site archive is currently held by Thames Valley Archaeological Services, 47–49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading, RG1 5NR, but will be deposited with Reading Museum in due course.

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford✓ 28.05.04
                          Steve Preston✓ 28.05.04
Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out during the construction of a new side extension at Florence House, High Street, Hurley, Berkshire (SU 8257 8384) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr G Hall of Watson Bertram and Fell, 5 Gay Street, Bath, BA1 2PH on behalf of Mr M Waterhouse.

A planning consent (03/41198) has been granted by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead to erect a two-storey side extension, following demolition of an existing garage and car port. The planning consent is subject to a condition relating to archaeology, which requires a watching brief to be carried out during groundworks. This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment’s Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990) and the Royal Borough’s policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr. Mike Hall, the acting archaeological adviser to the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.

The fieldwork was undertaken by Jo Pine and Sian Anthony on between 24th and 25th of May 2004 and the site code is FHH04/52. The site archive is currently held by Thames Valley Archaeological Services, 47–49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading, RG1 5NR, but will be deposited with Reading Museum in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site lies on the western side of High Street, close to its junction with Mill Lane. The extension was built on the south of the existing Florence House. This area was higher in elevation than the garden area of the property which lay to the south (Fig. 2). Geological maps indicate that the site lies on the border between alluvium and flood plain terrace, the underlying geology being river gravel (BGS 1990). The site lies at c. 25m above Ordnance Datum.


**Archaeological background**

The site is situated to the south-west of the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Hurley Benedictine Priory (SAM 19020), which was founded in 1086 by Geoffrey de Mandeville and under the control of the Abbey of Westminster until its suppression in 1536, when the land passed into lay hands (Ford 1987). A number of archaeological watching briefs have been carried out in the near vicinity. At Monks Garden, Mill Lane, a probable large ditch containing pottery dating to the mid 12th and 13th centuries was recorded. Two pits were also located; one of which was dated to the early 12th to late 13th century (Pine 1999). Archaeological watching briefs carried out on the foundations and associated services of Abbey House, Mill Lane and foundation trenches for a new conservatory at that property failed to reveal any archaeological features though a sherd of Roman pottery was recovered (Huscroft 1999; Hammond 2000). Archaeological watching briefs at Warren House, Lovelace Close (Ford 1996) and Ladye Place Boathouse, Mill Lane (Pine 1999) did not record any archaeological deposits.

**Objectives and methodology**

The purpose of the watching brief was to observe, excavate and fully record any archaeological deposits present and to establish dating and phasing for any features present on the site. This would involve the monitoring of the digging of foundation trenches for the new extension and the inspection of spoilheaps for artefacts.

**Results**

The majority of the foundation trenches were between 0.45m and 0.60m wide and varied in depth to between 1.20 and 1.60m. The stratigraphy observed in these trenches typically consisted of patio slabs or bricks onto sharp sand overlying made ground between 0.30m and 0.80m deep. This in turn sealed a dark grey brown clayey silt with occasional gravel inclusions (50), which was between 0.50 and 1.00m deep. This is possibly a buried soil, which in turn overlay the gravel natural.

*Stairwell Trench* (Figs 3 and 4)

A larger foundation trench, 1.50m by 3.50m and between 1.30m and 1.60m deep was excavated for a new stairwell. This was excavated butting the existing southern and basement wall of Florence house and thus this area of the site had been badly truncated. A large service, aligned north - south, had also truncated the area to at
least 1.00m below the present ground surface. The stratigraphy in the undisturbed areas of the trench appeared to be made ground, 0.80m deep, onto a dark grey brown silt (50) which was 0.50m deep. Cutting this was a red brick soakaway (2) which was partially exposed in the north-facing section of the trench. Beneath deposit 50, at 1.30m deep below the present ground surface, a feature (1) was seen in plan truncating the gravel. This feature’s full extent was not exposed but it had a slightly curving southern and western edge, was 2.00m by 1.10m and it continued beneath the present Florence House. It was excavated down by machine and hand for 0.30m but no further as that depth was the formation level for the construction works and thus the feature would be preserved in situ. Thirteen sherds of early Medieval pottery, and 3 pieces of animal bone were hand excavated from its fill (51). Two sherds of 11th–12th century pottery together with four pieces of animal bone were recovered from machine generated spoil which had come from the fill of feature 1.

The finds

Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 15 sherds with a total weight of 315g. The entire assemblage comprised early medieval, unglazed sandy wares. These pottery types are typical finds at contemporary sites in the middle Thames Valley, such as at nearby Maidenhead (Whittingham 2002, 87–8 and CD-ROM), and there is documentary evidence of potters operating at Henley-on-Thames in the 13th and 14th centuries (Mellor 1994, 208). The only feature sherds were single rim fragments from four jars, but one of these was somewhat unusual, having a large upright triangular pierced lug on the rim.

Generally, the sherds were fairly large and fresh, showing little evidence of redeposition, and indicates that the dating is reliable.

The following fabrics were noted:

F1: Medieval Sandy ware. Dense sub-rounded white and clear quartz up to 0.5mm. 11th-14th century?
14 sherds, 291g

F2: Rare sub-rounded pink and grey quartz up to 1 mm, rare limestone ooliths and sub-rounded calcareous fragments up to 2 mm, rounded glauconite up to 3mm. 11th–12th century? 1 sherd, 24g.
The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Appendix 1. Each date should be regarded as a terminus post quem.

**Animal Bone** by Sian Anthony

Only seven bones were recovered, all possibly from the same context. All were in excellent condition with little cortical flaking and with no sign of animal disturbance. The horse femur was from a mature, small but robust animal. Of the cattle bones, one metacarpal was from a large animal, the other relatively small. Ovicaprids were represented by a distal tibia, loose molar and scapula fragment. Butchery marks were present on two pieces: a radius was sawn through under the proximal end and three smallcuts on the anterior of the large metacarpal.

**Conclusion**

The watching brief located a feature which has been dated to the early Medieval, probably the 11th-12th century. Due to the restrictive nature of foundation trenches it was not possible to clarify the true character of this feature but its presence possibly reflects activity or occupation that occurred in the vicinity of or within the precinct of the medieval Priory.

The stratigraphy of the trenches together with an examination of the site on a landscape scale suggests this area of site has been raised up in the recent past. It is thus probable that further features survive in this area of the property, sealed by these made-ground deposits.

**References**

Hammond, S, 2000, Abbey House, Mill Lane, Hurley, Thames Valley Archaeological Services report 00/23, Reading
Huscroft, L, 1999, Abbey House, Mill Lane, Hurley, Thames Valley Archaeological Services report 99/36, Reading
Pine, J 1999, Ladye Place Boat Yard, Mill Lane, Hurley, Thames Valley Archaeological Services report 99/48, Reading
Pine, J 1999, Monks Garden, Mill Lane, Hurley, Thames Valley Archaeological Services report 98/83, Reading
Whittingham, L 2002, Early Medieval Pottery in S Foreman, J Hiller and D Pets, *Gathering the People, settling the land. The Archaeology of a Middle Thames Landscape* Oxford Archaeol Thames Valley Landscapes Monog 14, 87-90 and CD-ROM
APPENDIX 1: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

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**APPENDIX 2:** Animal Bone occurrence by number per context by species type

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<td><strong>2</strong></td>
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Figure 1. Location of site within Hurley and Berkshire.

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Figure 2. Location of site on High Street, Hurley.

Scale 1:2500
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An Archaeological Watching Brief

Figure 3. Location of foundation trenches observed.

Scale 1:100
Figure 5: Selected Sections.