Hungerford Library, Church Street, Hungerford, West Berkshire

An Archaeological Evaluation

For West Berkshire Council

By Sean Wallis
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code HCH 06/45

April 2006
Summary

Site name: Hungerford Library, Church Street, Hungerford, West Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 3372 6857

Site activity: Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 20th – 21st April 2006

Project manager: Joanna Pine

Site supervisor: Sean Wallis

Site code: HCH 06/45

Area of site: c. 450sq m

Summary of results: No archaeological deposits were observed.

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

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford 25.04.06
Jennifer Lowe 25.04.06
Introduction
This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at Hungerford Library, Church Street, Hungerford, West Berkshire (SU 3372 6857) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr. P.B. Virgo of Edginton, Spink & Hyne Riding Court, Riding Court Road, Datchet, Berkshire, SL3 9LE on behalf of West Berkshire Council.

Planning consent is to be sought from West Berkshire Council to redevelop the site. This requires that prior investigation of the site be undertaken with a view to characterising any archaeological remains present on site. This report documents the results of that investigation.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment’s Planning Policy Guidance, Archaeology and Planning (PPG16 1990), and the Borough Council’s policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Duncan Coe, Archaeology Officer with West Berkshire Heritage Services, advisors to West Berkshire Council on matters relating to archaeology. The fieldwork was undertaken by Sean Wallis and Mary O’Donoghue on the 20th-21st April 2006 and the site code is HCH 06/45. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at West Berkshire Museum in due course.

Location, topography and geology
The site comprises a relatively flat parcel of land, on the north side of Church Street, in the centre of Hungerford, West Berkshire (Fig. 2). Most of the site is currently occupied by a public toilet block, the current library building and a public car park. However, a narrow strip of land is available for trial trenching to the rear of the buildings, immediately south of the railway embankment, which carries the main line from London to the West Country. According to the British Geological Survey (BGS 1971) the site lies on the boundary of River and Valley Gravel and Upper Chalk with the possibility that alluvium may be present; however an orange brown clay with flints was encountered in each trench. The site lies at a height of c.102m AOD.
**Archaeological background**

In summary, Hungerford is likely to have begun as a small rural settlement in the 11th century though it is not mentioned in Domesday Book (Astill 1978). The early settlement appears to have been situated to the west of the current High Street, around the parish church. It appears that in the 12th century the decision was taken to lay out a planned town along the main Oxford to Salisbury Road. This included a broad High Street and a series of burgage plots running off to the east and west of this road. Church Street appears to have formed the main connecting street between the early settlement and the new planned town and thus provides an excellent opportunity to attempt to gain more archaeologically significant information about the transition of the town during this period. Little archaeological investigation has taken place within the centre of the town although extensive excavations have recently taken place to the north west (Ford 2002). However a watching brief to the north of the site, on the other side of the railway line, recorded three pits one of which contained 10th-11th century pottery (Smith 1996).

**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 evaluation were:

a) To determine if archaeologically relevant levels have survived on this site.

b) To determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present.

c) To determine if any evidence for the pre-urban (Saxon) phase of the town exists.

d) To determine if there is any evidence for the transition between the earlier settlement and later planned town which will aid in the dating of this latter occurrence.

e) To determine the extent of the medieval town.

f) To determine whether deposits relating to post-medieval activities are present on the site.

Two trenches were dug, one using a JCB-type machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket to expose archaeologically sensitive levels and the other entirely hand-dug, due to access limitations. The machine-dug trench was 4.5m long by 1.6m and the hand-dug trench 2m long by 1m wide. The machining was carried out under constant archaeological supervision and the spoilheap monitored for finds.
A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

Results

Trench 1 (Plate 1, Figs. 3 and 4)
This was orientated east-west and was 5.2 m long at the ground surface but only 4.5m in length at its base. A test pit was excavated at its western end to clarify the nature of the natural geology. The stratigraphy of the trench consisted of Tarmac and scalpins c.0.30m deep overlying buried concrete, which was 0.20m thick. This in turn sealed a hardcore/rubble levelling layer which was c.0.15m deep which in turn overlay a dark grey/brown sandy clay. This layer was c.0.40m thick and contained occasional gravel and is possibly a buried soil deposit. This in turn sealed a mid grey/brown sandy clay silt deposit (51) which was c.0.50m deep and contained tile and brick fragments. This overlay the natural geology of clay with flints at a depth of 1.60m below the present ground surface.

Trench 2 (Plate 2, Fig. 3)
This was a small hand dug test pit, which was 2m in length on a NE-SW axis and 1m wide. The stratigraphy of the trench was topsoil, containing modern plastic detritus (not retained), which was c.0.42m deep. This overlay a mid grey/brown sandy clay silt deposit, similar to the deposit (51) in Trench 1, which was c.0.30m deep. This contained coarse earthenware pottery sherds from a garden flower pot of 19th/20th century date and tile fragments, including peg tile and a brick fragment and contained tile and brick fragments. This layer sealed a light grey/brown silty clay layer (52), which was c.0.30m deep. This contained a single sherd of salt-glazed stoneware of 17th/18th century date, together with three clay pipe stems and a red brick fragment. This overlay the natural geology of clay with flints at a depth of 1.00m below the present ground surface.

Finds

Pottery
Three sherds of coarse earthenware pottery from a garden/flower pot of 19th/20th century date were recovered from Trench 2 (51), and a single sherd of Salt-glazed stoneware, of 17th/18th century date, was also recovered from Trench 2 (52).
Clay Pipe

Three clay pipe stem fragments were recovered from Trench 2 (52).

Brick and Tile

A decorated buff coloured brick was recovered from Trench 1 (51). A geometric star and crescent pattern was inscribed on one surface of the brick and it is probably of 19th/20th century date. A fragment of non frogged, solid brick in a red fragment was recovered from Trench 2(52). It is 10.5cm by 5cm, the length being indeterminable. This is probably 19th or 20th century date.

Twelve fragments of orange and red fabric tile were recovered from Trench 2 (51). Three of the fragments were peg tile, one appears to be derived from a mechanical press, the remaining were unidentifiable fragments.

Conclusion

Somewhat surprisingly, given the site’s location in the historical core of Hungerford, no archaeological deposits were recorded. The recovery of buried soils containing large fragments of brick, directly above the natural geology, without the presence of subsoil or sterile topsoil, suggests landscaping of the area. This was probably associated with the construction of the railway line in the mid 19th century, which lies directly to the north of the site, and the dating of the finds from the deposits does not contradict this.

References

Astill, G G, 1978, Historic towns in Berkshire; an archaeological appraisal, Berkshire Archaeol Comm Publ 2 Reading
Ford, S, 2002, Charnham Lane, Hungerford, Berkshire, archaeological investigations 1988–97, TVAS Monogr 1, Reading
### APPENDIX 1: Trench details

<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>4.5</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>E=1.70</td>
<td>0.0-0.30m topsoil; 0.30-0.50m concrete; 0.50-0.65m hardcore/rubble; 0.65-1.05m dark grey/brown sandy clay; 1.05-1.60m grey/brown sandy clay silt (51); 1.60m+ natural geology (clay with flints). <img src="#" alt="Plate 1" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>0.0-0.42m topsoil; 0.42-0.70m grey/brown sandy clay silt similar to deposit 51 in Trench 1; 0.70-1.00m grey/brown silty clay (52); 1.00m+ natural geology (clay with flints). <img src="#" alt="Plate 2" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

0m at W end
Hungerford Library, Church Street, Hungerford, West Berkshire, 2006
An archaeological evaluation

Figure 1. Location of site within Hungerford and Berkshire.

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Fig 2: Location of Site
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Fig 3: Location of Trenches

HCH 06/45
Trench 1

Tarmac/Scalpins

Concrete

Made ground

Grey/brown Sandy Clay (buried Topsoil)

Grey/Brown Sandy Clay Silt

Clay with flints

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Figure 4. Representative Section
Plate 1. Trench 1, looking west, horizontal scale 1m, vertical scale 2m.

Plate 2. Trench 2 looking south-west, horizontal scale 1m, vertical scale 0.5m.