Trinity School, Shaw House, Church Road, Shaw, Newbury, Berkshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

for Willmott Dixon Construction

by Kate Taylor
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code SHN00/66

November 2000
Summary

Site name: Trinity School, Shaw House, Church Road, Shaw, Newbury

Grid reference: SU4753 6830

Site activity: Watching brief

Site supervisor: Kate Taylor

Date and duration of project: 26th October 2000

Site code: SHN00/66

Area of site:  2.4m x 1.4m

Summary of results: A very small trench was dug in order to access a sewer pipe for repairs. This revealed a single negative feature with several fills. Four sherds of 12th–15th century pottery came from the lower fills. This feature may, therefore, predate the construction of the Tudor manor house (Shaw House). However, the trench was too small to provide sufficient information adequately to understand the deposits revealed.

Monuments identified: Possible medieval feature, medieval pottery.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held by Thames Valley Archaeological Services, 47–49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5NR. It is anticipated that the complete archive will be deposited with Newbury Museum under the accession number NEBYM:2000.17, given that permission is received from the landowners to deposit the finds.

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Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out in the grounds of Trinity School, Shaw House, Church Road, Shaw, Newbury (SU4753 6830) (Figs 1 and 2). The work was commissioned by Mr Sean Herbert of Willmott Dixon Construction, Cedar House, Cedar Lane, Frimley, Surrey, GU16 5HY.

During the construction of new school buildings adjacent to Shaw House it became necessary, as a matter of urgency, to excavate an access hole to allow the repair of a service pipe (Fig. 2). Following the guidelines set out in the Shaw House Conservation Plan (Rhodes et al. 1998) it was deemed necessary for an archaeologist to be present during the work.

The field investigation was carried out at the recommendation of Ms Veronica Fiorato, Principal Archaeological Officer at West Berkshire Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by Kate Taylor on 26th October 2000 and the site code is SHN00/66. It is anticipated that the archive will be deposited with Newbury Museum under the accession number NEBYM:2000.17, given that permission is received from the landowners to deposit the finds.

Location, topography and geology

Shaw House is located to the west of the village of Shaw, now a suburb on the north side of Newbury. It lies on sloping ground above the River Lambourn, which is just 200m to the south (Fig. 1). The excavation observed in this watching brief was to the south of the house, just inside the boundary wall and east of St Mary’s churchyard, at a height of 80m above Ordnance Datum (Fig. 2). According to the British Geological Survey (BGS 1947) the underlying geology is Upper Chalk or river and valley gravel but the natural deposits observed on site were firm yellow sandy clays.
Archaeological background

Shaw House and its grounds are known best for the Tudor manor house and the later history of the estate; little is known of the earlier activity in the area, which has not been subject to a great deal of archaeological investigation until recently. The lower reaches of the Lambourn Valley, close to the confluence with the river Kennet, are rich in finds and deposits of Mesolithic date and, indeed, Mesolithic and Neolithic flints have been recovered in the vicinity (SMR 03884.00.000; SU 476683). The nearest evidence of Roman activity is an urn allegedly recovered from St Mary’s churchyard in 1878 (SMR 02884.00.000), but kilns are recorded nearby (SMR 02885.00.000; SU 473685) and Love Lane, which runs east–west to the north of Shaw House, appears to follow the alignment of Ermine Street (SMR 01163.07.000).

Although the current church of St Mary’s was constructed in 1840 it is believed to have originally had a Saxon round tower (SMR 03466.00.000) and excavations in the churchyard in 1995 revealed 12th–13th century ditches (Howell 1995) (SMR 03466.01.100). The recent evaluation of the site in advance of the current construction of school buildings involved trenches being dug at various points around the grounds of the house. None were within the garden boundary or particularly near the excavated location covered in this watching brief. However, further medieval features were discovered to the south and west of the church (NA 1999).

Although many references are made to the medieval manor of Shaw, the location of the early manor house is unknown. In 1554 Thomas Dolman bought the manor and soon after began the construction of the new Shaw House. Thomas was a successful clothier with a factory in Northbrook Street, Newbury. He was the son of William Dolman who had come to the area from Yorkshire and become foreman to the famous clothier John Winchcombe, better known as ‘Jack of Newbury’. Unfortunately, Thomas Dolman died before the house was finished and work was completed by his son, also Thomas, in 1581 (VCH 1924). The house is a splendid example of Tudor architecture and is a Grade I listed building (SMR 03467.00.000).

The house was also an important location during the English Civil War, central to the Second Battle of Newbury. In this skirmish, on the 27th October 1644, Donnington Castle, held for the King by Sir John Boys, was under attack, and the battle raged around Shaw House for some hours. It was successfully defended by Lieut.-Col. Page and after this excitement the Dolman family adopted the motto ‘King and Law, Shouts Dolman of Shaw’ (VCH 1924). An earthwork that runs round part of the gardens is thought to represent a defensive bank from this period (SMR 03467.01.000).
The house was sold in 1721 to the Duke of Chandos, who finally took possession in 1728 after some legal wrangling. He began a programme of work on the house and garden but sold the property in 1751 to a London man, Joseph Andrews. He also oversaw a great deal of work on the house and gardens and recorded this in detail. Luckily his notebooks, with plans of the property as he took it on as well as ideas for remodelling it, survive and are held by Newbury Museum (Rhodes et al. 1998).

The location of the excavated trench, within the boundary of the immediate grounds of the house and close to the suspected defensive embankment, suggested the possibility of archaeological deposits of some significance being present. In particular it was considered that Tudor or later garden features, or Civil War defences might be disturbed by the intrusion, or possibly evidence of other activity predating the construction of the house.

**Objectives and methodology**

The purpose of the watching brief was to observe and record the deposits encountered during the excavation of the access trench. This trench was a rectangular hole, 2.4m by 1.4m and 1.5m deep. It was mostly excavated by a small machine, with additional work done by hand. This work was conducted under constant archaeological supervision. Once completed the excavated sections were hand cleaned and recorded photographically and by illustration. Artefacts were retrieved from the in situ deposits and the spoil was also monitored for finds.

**Results**

The majority of the area of excavation was naturally taken up by the 0.70m wide backfilled trench originally dug to lay the sewer pipe that was to be relocated and unblocked. This had been cut from immediately below the current turf layer that was extremely thin in this area, being partially under the canopy of a large tree.

Below this a series of deposits could be seen to be filling a large negative feature (1), maximum depth 1.30m, which was deepest in the south-west of the slot (Fig. 3). It had a fairly rounded profile in the east facing section and the deposits that could be seen in the small visible portion all sloped down from the northern edge. It was not possible to determine the nature of the feature beyond the profile; it could be a ditch or possibly a large pit as the opposing section is less deep and has a flatter base. However, the feature would appear to be larger than the excavated hole in each direction. The lower fills (53–58) were alternately grey/brown and yellow sandy clays, which appear to be natural silting up of the feature. Above these was a layer of compact chalk rubble (52)
which seemed to be deliberate backfill. The final fill, a gravely sandy clay (51) levelled the feature sufficiently that it could not be seen on the surface.

Four sherds of pottery were recovered from the lower fills. These are of a fabric that was produced between the late 12th or early 13th century and the late 14th or early 15th century. If these sherds are not residual, then they give a medieval date to the feature, i.e. prior to the construction of Shaw House in the late 16th century. In addition, seven small fragments of tile and/or brick were found in these sandy clay fills; these could be medieval or post-medieval in date. Finally, a large piece of brick came from the chalk rubble backfill. It is not possible to assign an exact date to the item but the dimensions suggest that it might be the same as the bricks used in Shaw House itself and could possibly have been deposited during the construction of the new manor house.

Finds

Pottery by Jane Timby

The watching brief resulted in the recovery of four small sherds of medieval pottery from two contexts. The pieces were very small, although with relatively fresh edges; the two sherds from (55) join, the fracture being recent. All the sherds belong to the same potting tradition, local to the Kennet Valley. The fabrics contain sand, flint and limestone and equate with Newbury fabric B. The sherds are from handmade jars. The tradition is a fairly long-lived one dating from the late 12th or early 13th century through to the late 14th or early 15th century.

Catalogue:

[1] (55) Two joining sherds, weight 5gms.
[1] (58) Two sherds, weight 5gms.

Brick and Tile

A large broken piece of brick and a few small fragments of brick and/or tile were recovered from feature 1. The brick is at least 140mm (5½ inches) long, at least 116mm (4¼ inches) wide and 63mm (2½ inches) thick, the full length and width having been lost by both antique and fresh breaks. The surviving long side is fairly smooth, as is one of the large faces, but the other is extremely rough, showing signs of its having been pressed into a mould by hand. It is unfrogged.
Dating this brick is difficult. It is hand-made and unfrogged so is unlikely to be later than the late 18th century (Hammond 1981, 11). However, the dimensions appear rather contradictory. Early medieval ‘great bricks’ were 13 by 6 by 2 inches and later medieval styles were typically 2 inches thick, although numerous different brick types are recorded (Harley 1974). The 2½ inch brick was demanded by law in 1769 (Hammond 1981, 30) but this design was 4 inches across, narrower than the example from Shaw House. However, the bricks used in Shaw House itself are 11 by 2½ inches (VCH 1924), and as the fabric also appears to be a similar colour it is possible that this example originates from the construction of the existing Shaw House, giving it a late 16th century date.

The small fragments of tile and/or brick are fairly undiagnostic handmade pieces and could be either medieval or post-medieval in date.

Catalogue:
[1] (52) Two joining fragments of hand-made brick, weight 1326gms.
[1] (53) Two joining fragments of tile, weight 28gms.
[1] (55) Five small abraded pieces of tile or brick, weight 34gms.

Conclusion
The small intrusion monitored during this watching brief has allowed a glimpse below the lawns of the Tudor manor of Shaw House. A brief examination of the history of the house and grounds has not identified any features that are recorded as being located in this exact spot but it was postulated that excavation might reveal evidence of garden features or perhaps Civil War defences.

The feature that was discovered, however, appears to be earlier than the house, containing pottery that is late 12th to early 15th century in date. It seems that this large feature partially silted up naturally and was then deliberately backfilled with chalk rubble to create a level surface. As this chalk contained a brick that is similar to those used in Shaw House itself it is possible that this levelling took place at the time of, or shortly after, the construction of Thomas Dolman’s new manor house and the creation of the accompanying gardens. Any conclusions reached from this work must be considered as tenuous as the excavated area was exceptionally small and did not allow for a particularly clear understanding of the deposits revealed.
References


Harley, L, 1974, ‘A typology of brick: with numerical coding of brick characteristics’, *J Brit Archaeol Ass* 37, 63–87

Howell, I, 1995, St Mary’s Church. Shaw-cum-Donnington, nr Newbury, Berkshire, archaeological fieldwork, Thames Valley Archaeological Services report 94/18, Reading

NA 1999, Shaw House, Donnington, West Berkshire, archaeological evaluation, geophysical survey and evaluation trenching phases 1 & 2, Northampton Archaeology, Northampton


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Figure 1. Location of site within Newbury and Berkshire.

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Figure 2. Location of watching brief.