St John’s House, The Close, Odiham, Hampshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For Bewley Homes plc

By Andrew Mundin
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code SHO 05/58

July 2007
Summary

Site name: St John’s House, The Close, Odiham, Hampshire

Grid reference: SU 7390 5095

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 19th March to 4th April 2007

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Sean Wallis, Jennifer Lowe

Site code: SHO 05/58

Area of site: c.0.45ha

Summary of results: No structures or features of archaeological note were recorded during this watching brief.

Monuments identified: None

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

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Report 05/58b

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at St John’s House, The Close, Odiham, Hampshire (SU 7390 5095) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Terry Theobald, for Bewley Homes plc, Inhurst House, Brimpton Road, Baughurst, Hampshire, RG26 5JJ.

Planning permission (app no 05/00804/FUL) has been granted on appeal (application numbers APP/N1730/A/05/1189252 and APP/N1730/E/05/11892551) by Hart District Council for the demolition of some of the existing buildings on site and the construction on four new housing plots. The consent is subject to a condition (16) requiring an archaeological 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 District Council’s policies on archaeology. The archaeological potential of the site was highlighted by the desk-based assessment for the project (Lowe 2005). The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Stephen Appleby, Senior Archaeologist with Hampshire County Council, archaeological adviser to the District. The field investigation was carried out by Sean Wallis and Jennifer Lowe between 19th March to 4th April 2007 and the site code is SHO 05/58.

Location, topography and geology

The site is a roughly L-shaped parcel of land of 0.45ha located within the historic core of Odiham, to the south of the High Street (Fig. 2). Several brick-built residential properties occupy the central area of the site. To the east are a tennis court and swimming pool, and a garden to the west. The site is accessed via The Close, which leads into an open courtyard; the swimming pool area to the west is slightly higher than the courtyard, suggesting this part of the site may have been built up at some point in the past. Similarly the tennis court is at a much lower level to the pool and may suggest that the ground level in this area has been reduced. From the courtyard area the site slopes down slightly towards the northern half of the site. The area immediately around the western range of buildings is at a much lower level again indicating possible truncation here. The site lies at a height of approximately 95m above Ordnance Datum and is located on the Upper Chalk close to the limit of the chalk downs and not far from the Tertiary gravels and clays of north-east Hampshire (BGS 1981).
Archaeological background

A desktop study carried out as a part of the original planning application has highlighted the archaeological potential of the site (Lowe 2005). In summary, the site lies in the historic core of the settlement in a designated area of High Archaeological Potential. Odiham appears to have had great importance during Saxon times as a prosperous centre, belonging to Earl (later King) Harold. The existence of an area known as the Bury to the south-east may be suggestive of a Saxon fortification (*burh*). Numerous medieval buildings survive in the immediate area of 184 High Street. This is thought to be the site of a later medieval priory, but no evidence has been found of this.

Evidence of pre-medieval activity is rare, however, prehistoric and Roman activity have been recorded to the south-west of the development area. In an historic town such as Odiham, there is a high probability that medieval deposits would be encountered. The site’s location to the rear of the High Street suggests a high potential of deposits relating to burgage plots from the medieval period. In addition the site is also located within close proximity to the 13th-century church, generally the focus of settlement during the medieval period.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by groundworks. An assessment of deposits truncated by recent and previous ground reduction and demolition was also required. This involved the examination of all areas of intrusive groundworks, in particular any ground reduction, and digging of foundation trenches for the house plots and services runs (if excavated deep enough) as appropriate.

Results

*Plots 1 and 2*

Work in this area comprised the digging of footings and ground reduction. It lay to the western edge of the previous construction of St John’s House, basements of which were uncovered in the eastern part of the plot (Fig. 3). This ground showed signs of significant ground disturbance from the previous construction. Overall, the area was reduced and then footings were excavated to c. 2m deep. The stratigraphy noted was: a dark brown/grey topsoil to a depth of 0.3m overlay dark orange/brown clayey made ground to a depth of 0.8m. Below this to the base of excavation lay a mid grey/brown silty clay, which was not a natural deposit, but was probably
an imported leveling material. No finds were recorded in the made ground, though it is thought to be of a recent date. No finds were recovered from the layer below.

Plot 3
Plot 3 was largely composed of an existing building. An extension was added to this structure at its eastern side, and the foundations for this were observed. This rectangular extension measured c.4m x 6m and was excavated to 1.4m depth. The stratigraphy observed was topsoil to a depth of 0.6m, over a dark orange/brown silty clay with occasional chalk fragments and flecks. No finds were recovered from these layers. At a depth of 0.9m natural chalk was recorded to the base of excavation (Fig. 4). No archaeological features were observed in the footings.

Plot 4
All the footings for this new plot were viewed including the footing for the attached garage. Startigraphy varied slightly across this plot. In the south-east side of the footings 0.20m of topsoil overlay undisturbed dark grey/brown silty clay subsoil, 0.4m deep, which in turn overlay natural chalk, and was recorded to a depth of 1m. This stratigraphy varied in the north–western corner of the plot where 0.60m of topsoil was observed overlying 0.30m of mid grey/brown silty clay which in turn sealed a mid orange/brown silty clay recorded to a depth of 1.10m; fragments of modern brick rubble were observed in both these lower layers. The natural chalk was not observed in this corner of the foundations. Towards the southern side of the plot the stratigraphy changed again to 0.2m of topsoil over a mid orange/brown silty clay subsoil. No finds were recovered from this layer. Natural chalk was recorded at a depth of 0.8m to the base of excavation at 1.1m. No archaeological features were recorded in the base of these footings.

Plot 5
This plot was located in the area previously occupied by the swimming pool. The majority of the plot was reduced to a depth of between 1.30–1.50m and the stratigraphy observed comprised 0.50m of topsoil overlying 0.25m–0.40m of mid orange/brown silty clay subsoil. The natural chalk was observed at a depth of between 0.75–0.90m. Natural geology was not observed in the western corner of the plot. The outline of the swimming pool was observed truncating the natural chalk. No archaeological finds or features were observed in this plot.
Conclusion

No archaeological finds or features were recorded on this site. Some of the new plots were located in areas of previous disturbance which may have truncated any archaeological deposits if originally present. No finds of a medieval date or earlier were uncovered on this site which suggests either that the burgage plots of the High Street may not have extended into this area, as indeed is suggested by the layout of The Close (HCC 2002), or that truncation has removed any such traces.

References
An Archaeological Watching Brief

Figure 1. Location of site within Odiham and Hampshire.

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Ordnance Survey Licence 100025880
Figure 2. Detailed location of site on The Close.

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Figure 3. Areas observed during the watching brief


- Plot 4
  - Footings observed
- Plot 3
  - Footings observed
  - Stripped ground
  - Reduced ground
- Plot 1 & 2
- Remains of basement from St. John's House

No. 133

Plot 5

SU73900

50900

SU73900

The Close

51000

50900

6 25m

Figure 4. Representative section of plot 3.

Plot 3

Topsoil

Subsoil
(orange/brown silty clay with some chalk flecks)

Natural geology
(chalk)

Base of trench

96.2m AOD