Summary

Site name: St Mary’s Lee, Church Lane, Silchester, Hampshire

Grid reference: SU 6440 6238

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 18th-19th March 2013

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Susan Porter

Site code: SML 12/64

Area of site: 51 sq m

Summary of results: Made ground deposits at least 1.60m deep were recorded. The upper layers were post-medieval and modern (as dated in the previous evaluation), perhaps upcast from the nearby pond, but the lower deposits could not be dated. It remains unclear if they form part of the Roman defences.

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 Museums Service in due course.

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford✓ 28.05.13
Steve Preston✓ 28.05.13
Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at St Mary’s Lee, Church Lane, Silchester, Hampshire SU 6440 6238 (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Richard Stamvik, St Mary’s Lee, Church Lane, Silchester, Hampshire RG7 2HH.

Scheduled Monument Consent (S00050636) has been gained from the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport for the construction of a new swimming pool at St Mary’s Lee. As a condition of the Consent, an archaeological watching brief was required to take place during the groundworks.

This is in accordance with the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act (1979). The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Richard Massey, Inspector of Ancient Monuments for English Heritage. The fieldwork was undertaken by Susan Porter between 18th – 19th March 2013 and the site code is SML 12/164.

The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Hampshire Museums Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on the western side of Church Lane, Silchester, adjacent to the parish church of St Mary’s. It also lies adjacent to the stone wall of Silchester Roman town and within the area of the scheduled monument (Fig. 1). The site is recorded as lying on the edge of the Plateau gravel and Lower Bagshot Beds (BGS 1971), and at a height of c.90m above Ordnance Datum. The land currently forms a rear garden to the house. The land is built up from the road on the south-eastern side and slopes steeply down to the north-west beyond the hedge. A more gentle slope can be observed from north to south (Fig. 2).

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site stems from its location within the area of the scheduled monument of Calleva Atrebatum, the late Iron Age oppidum, and Roman town of Silchester (SAM no 243356) (Fulford and Corney 1984; Fulford and Timby 2000). It lies outside the Roman town’s stone built wall, just south of the east
gate, but sits on top of an earthwork and may potentially be within an area of extra-mural Roman settlement or in an area of the town that was larger than that eventually enclosed by the stone wall. It is not clear if the earthwork in this location is ancient, as it may be associated with the pond or with the road. The site also lies close to the medieval parish church and probably within the original medieval village of Silchester, which was subsequently deserted (Ford and Hopkins 2011). Excavations not far to the north at Manor Farm had revealed a Flavian ditch, but also much later disturbance (Fulford 1984, 37–41). An evaluation carried out on the site in 2012 revealed made ground deposits of which the upper layers were post-medieval, however the lower deposits could not be dated (Porter 2012).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the works. The new swimming pool measuring c. 8.5m x 3.6m and c. 1.5m deep as well as any foundation trenches would involve deep intrusive groundwork and the watching brief was to involve examination of these areas.

Archaeological deposits which were threatened by development were to be excavated and recorded. Archaeological deposits which were exposed by the groundworks were to be recorded but not excavated unless threatened by the groundworks. A metal detector was used to enhance recovery of metal finds. Topsoil and overburden was removed by a 5-ton mini-digger equipped with a toothless ditching bucket.

Results

The total area of the proposed pool was excavated as an extension to the previous location of evaluation Trench 1 (Fig. 3). The pool was aligned roughly north-south and the area of the pool and all associated foundations measured 10.20m in length and 5m in width. To the west the depth was 1.70m, rising to 1.50m in the east. The spoil heaps and base of the excavated pool trench were monitored and searched with a metal detector to enhance finds recovery.

The stratigraphy of the pool excavation (eastern section) consisted of 0.40m topsoil, overlying 0.20m of a dark brown clayey sand (55) with frequent 5-20mm gravel which contained no finds. This in turn overlay undated made ground (56), a light brown/grey clayey sand with frequent 5-10mm gravel and flint inclusions which was 0.50m deep. This sealed a made ground deposit 0.30m thick, of a mid brown/yellow sandy clay (57) with flint and 5-15mm gravel which again contained no finds. This then sealed 0.10m+ of light brown/grey silty clay deposit (58), this made ground again being undated as no finds were recovered. The natural geology was not
observed at this depth (Fig. 4), and so should any deposits of archaeological interest survive below this depth they will be preserved in situ below the new pool structure.

**Finds**

No finds of archaeological interest were recovered.

**Conclusion**

The watching brief revealed much the same results as the previous evaluation carried out on the site, showing that there were deep made ground deposits continuing below 1.70m below the present ground surface. This reflects the new pool location; on raised ground with a steep drop to both east and west. The previous evaluation yielded finds of post-medieval date within the uppermost made ground deposits, although during this watching brief no further finds were recovered. Unfortunately as no artefacts were recovered dating of the deposition of the lower dump deposits remains elusive. It remains possible that these lower levels may represent materials of a Roman rampart or some other construction surrounding Silchester. However, it is considered that the pond lies in the town ditch and that the principal rampart lies beneath the stone wall to the west (Fulford and Corney 1984, fig 35). The current site lies east of the pond and some or all of the deposits could relate to construction of the road to the east or landscaping of the overburden generated from the digging of the pond to the west.

The depth attained in the excavation for the pool and associated foundations did not reach the natural geology, and it is possible that further layers remain below. As such if any deposits of archaeological interest remain below this depth they have not been damaged or destroyed by the works.

**References**

Porter, S, 2012, ‘St Mary’s Lee, Church Lane, Silchester, Hampshire; an archaeological evaluation’, Thames Valley Archaeological Services unpubl rep 12/164, Reading
St Mary's Lee, Church Lane, Silchester, Hampshire, 2013
Archaeological Watching Brief
Figure 1. Location of site in relation to Calleva Atrebatum, modern Silchester and within Hampshire.
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Figure 2. Detailed location of site.

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Figure 3. Location of watching brief

St Mary’s Lee, Church Road, Silchester,
Hampshire, 2013
Archaeological watching brief

Figure 3. Location of watching brief
St Mary's Lee, Church Road, Silchester, Hampshire, 2013
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Figure 4. Representative section.

Topsoil (50)

- Dark grey brown clayey sand with gravel inclusions (55: Modern made ground)

- Light brown grey clayey sand silt with gravel inclusions (56: Made ground)

- Brown grey clayey sand with gravel inclusions (57: Made ground)

- Light brown grey silty clay with gravel inclusions (58: Made ground) base of trench

Natural geology not reached

90.7maOD
Plate 1. The pool excavated, looking south-west, Scales: 2m and 1m.

Plate 2. Representative section, looking north-east, Scales: 2m and 1m.
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