50 Watling Lane, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire

Archaeological Watching Brief

by Andy Mundin

Site Code: WLD12/174

(SU 5762 9398)
50 Watling Lane, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For Ms Chrissie Wright

by Andrew Mundin
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code WLD 12/174

June 2013
Summary

Site name: 50 Watling Lane, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SU 5762 9398

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 2nd April 2013

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Andrew Mundin

Site code: WLD 12/174

Area of site: 38sq m

Summary of results: A new rear extension as part of the refurbishment of this house was observed during excavation. No archaeological finds or deposits were uncovered during these works.

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

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford 11.06.13
                        Steve Preston 11.06.13
Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at 50 Watling Lane, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire OX10 7JQ. (SU5762 9398) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Peter McWilliam of Matthew T. Young Architects, 25 Hunts Mill, Goldsmiths Lane, Wallingford, Oxfordshire, OX10 0DN, on behalf of the homeowner, Ms Chrissie Wright, 11 Buckners Close, Benson, OX10 6LR.

Planning permission (P12/S1656/FUL) has been gained from South Oxfordshire District Council for the refurbishment and construction of a new extension, with two conditions relating to archaeology that require a watching brief to be carried out during the groundworks.

This is in accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government’s National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2012, para 128) and the District Council’s policies on archaeology. The field investigation follows a written scheme of investigation based on a brief (Oram 2012) and approved by Mr Richard Oram, Planning Archaeologist for Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service. The fieldwork was undertaken by Andrew Mundin from 2nd April and the site code is WLD 12/174.

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

Location, topography and geology

Dorchester-on-Thames is situated just north of the confluence of the rivers Thames and Thame (Fig. 1). The site is located just beyond the south west corner of the outer circuit of the Scheduled Monument of the Roman town (Fig. 2). The existing house plot is on a raised piece of ground in comparison to the neighbouring row of houses to the east which lie at road level. The site is mapped as situated on First (Flood Plain) Terrace Gravel, overlaying upper Greensand (BGS 1980) and lies approximately 49m above Ordnance Datum (OD).

Archaeological background

The site lies in an area of considerable archaeological significance, immediately adjacent to the circuit of the Scheduled Ancient Monument of the Roman town (OX 116), which subsequently became Dorcic in the Saxon
period, but declined as a regional centre in Medieval times. The Iron Age precursor to the town, known as the Dyke Hills oppidum, a defended settlement, is situated some 200m southwards. This is also a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) with the banks still clearly visible (OX17). The earlier Iron Age hillfort at Wittenham Clumps, also known as the Sinodum Hills, lies beyond this.

Unlike the other nearby towns at Alchester, outside modern Bicester, Dorchester's continued development masks the true extent of the Roman settlement, though it is estimated to cover 5.5ha (Henig and Booth 2000), contained by a enclosure ditch circuit and a later wall. The earthwork is thought to have been established in the late 2nd century, with the wall added in the 3rd century (Munby and Rodwell 1975). The town may be one of the few urban centres to have continued to flourish into the 5th century (Frere 1962; Bradley 1978), when many other towns were being abandoned.

Although situated outside the town wall, other archaeological features are known close by (Benson and Miles 1974, map 36) with extra-mural settlement and burial recorded. There is a possibility of a Roman fort being established prior to the town. Numerous watching briefs have occurred in recent times on the southern parts of Dorchester outside the scheduled area and have uncovered complex intercutting features and burial in relatively small areas of investigation, as with one such investigation on Orchard Haven (Mundin 2008).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record archaeological deposits affected by the new groundworks. This would involve observations of areas of intrusive groundworks, which would predominantly include reduced strip areas, footing trenches and service runs. All works were to be carried out with a bladed ditching bucket fitted to a mechanical excavator.

Results

Foundation trench

The footings for the extension were 3.5m long and 0.6m wide and joined the southern corner of the existing house (Figs 3 and 4). An existing smaller extension was removed but it's floor slab was retained. The new foundation was dug on the western and southern edge of it.

The footing trench was 1.1m deep, increasing slightly towards the east to a depth of 1.3m. A deep layer of topsoil overburden up to 0.7m thick deep was present throughout the trench. Below this was a layer of orange-brown clayey silt. This deposit extended to the base of excavation, which was formed by gravel natural geology.
It was considered possible that the orange/brown clayey silt and topsoil above the gravel had been imported onto the site and which might account for a difference in levels between the site and the road to the east. However, neither of the layers above gravel contained any artefacts to provide dating evidence and it seems more likely that the clayey silt is a natural capping deposit overlying the gravel.

**Drainage trench**

The route of a new drainage trench was taken through the existing garage to the east of the extension. It was dug no deeper than 0.4m, include the depth of the existing concrete slab and was of insufficient depth to expose the archaeologically relevant horizon.

**Finds**

No finds were recovered from the groundworks.

**Conclusion**

No archaeological deposits nor artefacts were encountered during the groundworks.

**References**

Benson, D and Miles, D, 1974, *The Upper Thames Valley: an archaeological survey of the river gravels*, Oxfordshire Archaeol Unit Survey 2, Oxford
Mundin, A, 2008, ‘Pippins, 5 Orchard Haven, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire: an archaeological watching brief’, Thames Valley Archaeological Services rep 08/95, Reading
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Figure 1. Location of site within Dorchester--on-Thames and Oxfordshire.
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Figure 2. Detailed location of site, in relation to the Schedule Ancient Monument (SAM OX116).
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Figure 3. Location of observed areas.
Dark brown humic topsoil

Orange brown clayey silt (natural geology or subsoil?)

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Figure 4. Representative section of footing.
Plate 1. Location of new trench, looking north.

Plate 2. Representative section, looking south west, Scales: 1m.
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<tr>
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