23 Market Street, 
Alton, Hampshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief
For NSL Management

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Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code MPA 05/114

January 2006
Summary

**Site name:** 23 Market Street, Alton, Hampshire

**Grid reference:** SU 7166 3936

**Site activity:** Watching Brief

**Date and duration of project:** 16th–23rd January 2006

**Project manager:** Steve Ford

**Site supervisor:** Jennifer Lowe and Richard Oram

**Site code:** MPA 05/114

**Area of site:** c.0.3ha

**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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Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at 23 Market St, Alton, Hampshire (SU 7166 3936) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Chris Dennis of NSL Management, PO Box 1177, Ascot, Berkshire, SL5 9YA.

Planning permission (F.28088/004/FUL) has been granted by East Hampshire District Council for the construction of four new terraced houses to the rear of the existing building, with alterations to the site boundaries and access (Fig. 2). The consent is subject to a condition relating to archaeology, which requires all groundworks to be monitored by a qualified archaeologist.

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 field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Stephen Appleby, Senior Archaeologist for Hampshire County Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by Richard Oram and Jennifer Lowe between 16th and 23rd January 2006 and the site code is MPA 05/114.

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

Location, topography and geology

The site is found in the town of Alton and is located on the banks of the River Wey c.800m east of its source. In fact the name Alton is derived from Old English (c.450-c.1100) usually meaning ‘farmstead at the source of a river’ (Mills 1998). The site is currently occupied by a grade II listed building on the street frontage (18th-century façade to earlier timber structure, possibly 17th century) with a yard/garden to the rear where the new properties were to be constructed. The site slopes up from north to south and lies at approximately 110m above Ordnance Datum, on the geological boundary between river and valley gravels and Lower Chalk (grey marl chalk) with maps indicating the possibility of alluvium sealing both (BGS 1990). A red/orange silty clay deposit (alluvium?) capping a light white clayey chalk or chalky clay (marl) was encountered within the foundation trenches.
Archaeological background

The site lies within the historic core of Alton, known to have medieval or Saxon origins. Despite the paucity of large-scale archaeological investigations within Alton and its surrounding area (Hughes 1976, 23 – 28) recent small projects have given some insight into its archaeological background (Edwards 2002; Taylor and Hammond in press). Intensive medieval activity has been identified along the High Street including medieval buildings fronting the street. Market encroachment within Market Street, where later properties replaced temporary structures, may include the proposal site. The site is in an area designated as of High Archaeological Importance (Edwards 2002, map G).

The course of a Roman road to the east of Alton and a Roman settlement to the north-east should also be noted.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the groundworks, involving examination of all areas of intrusive groundworks, in particular any ground reduction and the digging of foundations and trenches.

Results

Foundation trenches were excavated, between 0.80m and 1.00m wide and between 1.40m and 2.00m deep (Fig. 3). The foundation trenches for house plot 1 at the south of the site typically showed made ground 0.50m–1.00m deep, overlying a red/orange clay deposit which was 0.40m deep. This sealed a light off white clayey (marl) chalk. The trenches for house plot 2 showed made ground 0.50m deep onto a dark grey silty clay (perhaps a buried soil) onto an orange clay. House plots 3 and 4 consisted of a topsoil layer 0.20m deep onto made ground 1.20m deep. No natural geology was observed in these trenches.

No archaeological features were recorded within any of the foundation trenches.

Finds

No finds of archaeological interest were noted: modern detritus was not retained.
Conclusion

Despite the location of the site within the historic medieval core of the town, no archaeological deposits or features were observed, nor finds of archaeological significance were recovered during the fieldwork. It may be that this area of Alton was lightly used in medieval times or that the development lay within the rear of a burgage plot which was not intensively utilized.

References
Hampshire County Council and English Heritage
Hughes, M, 1976, The Small Towns of Hampshire, Hampshire Archaeol Comm, Winchester
23 Market Place, Alton, Hampshire, 2006
An Archaeological Watching Brief

Figure 1. Location of site within Alton and Hampshire.

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An Archaeological Watching Brief

Figure 2. Detailed location of site on Market Street.

Scale: 1:1250
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An Archaeological Watching Brief

Figure 3. Location of foundation trenches observed.

Scale: 1:200
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Plot 1

Made Ground

Red/Orange silty clay

Lower Chalk

Base of Trench

Plot 2

Made Ground

Dark brown silty clay

Base of Trench

Figure 4. Representative sections of foundation trenches.