Old Forge, Pearson Road, Sonning, Berkshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For Mr F Williams

by James McNicoll-Norbury
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code PRS 08/100

December 2008
Summary

Site name: Old Forge, Pearson Road, Sonning, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 7582 7537

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 3rd October – 15th October 2008

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Andy Taylor

Site code: PRS 08/100

Summary of results: No deposits nor artifacts of archaeological interest were identified

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

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford 23.12.08
Jennifer Lowe 24.12.08
Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at Unit 4, Old Forge, Pearson Road, Sonning, Berkshire (SU 7582 7537) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Tony Grover of BDS Surveyors Limited, Windward House, Hollow Lane, Shinfield, Reading, Berkshire, RG2 9DX on behalf of Mr F Williams.

Planning permission (app no F2003/9987) has been granted by Wokingham Council for the construction of a new office building following demolition of an existing workshop and garage. The consent is subject to a condition (10) relating to archaeology which requires the site to be investigated during ground works.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment’s Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the Council’s policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Ms Mary O’Donoghue Archaeological Officer for Berkshire Archaeology. The fieldwork was undertaken by Simon Cass, Andy Taylor and Steve Ford between the 3rd October and 15th October 2008 and the site code is PRS 08/100.

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

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on the south side of Pearson Road in the centre of Sonning which lies just outside of Reading, Berkshire (Fig. 2). The site was previously occupied by a workshop and garage that were demolished prior to the ground works taking place. The underlying geology is Gravel (BGS 1971), which was observed in the exposed footings. The site lies at c. 50m above Ordnance Datum.

Archaeological background

The site lies close to the Saxon and medieval settlement of Sonning which was an important administrative and ecclesiastical centre in Saxon and medieval times. Various fieldwork projects have revealed deposits within the settlement. To the west is the site of the Bishop’s Palace, the known remains, which dates from as early as the
13th Century were partly excavated during the First World War and revealed medieval buildings. Other excavations in the grounds of the vicarage to the north uncovered deposits of late Saxon and early medieval date (Hull and Hall 2003). Charnel deposits of uncertain date have been recovered at the Bull Inn to the north west of the proposal site (Milbank 2007) with Saxon inhumations nearby. At Old Walls, to the west, medieval boundary features have been found (Milbank 2006; Taylor 2006). However, a watching brief at the Dower House on the north side of Pearson Road almost opposite the site, revealed no archaeological deposits (Lowe 2008). In more general terms, the site lies in the archaeologically rich Thames Valley with important prehistoric and Roman remains visible from the air situated to the east of the village (Ford 1987; Gates 1975; Slade 1964).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the ground works. This was to involve examination of all areas of intrusive ground works, in particular any ground reduction, and the digging of trenches for foundation and services. Spoil heaps were to be monitored and all possible archaeological deposits to be hand cleaned and recorded.

Results

The footprint of the proposed structure was stripped of overburden to a depth of 0.5m shallowing to the north to accommodate the slope on the site (Fig. 3). The remaining groundworks comprised the digging of a single foundation trench which formed the perimeter of the new building. The footing trench was 0.6m wide with its depth also shallowing to the north to compensate for the slope. The stratigraphy exposed in the trench footings at the south end comprised 0.06m of Tarmac which overlay 0.13m of hoggin (made ground). In turn this overlay 1.11m of orangey brown sandy silt overlying gravel. The trench at the south end was c. 1.4m deep (Fig. 4). The stripped interior of the new structure only revealed brown sandy silt. It is not entirely clear if the brown sandy silt overlying the gravel is the natural geology, and similar to ‘brickearth’ deposits elsewhere, or just unusually thick subsoil. The former interpretation is preferred.

Disturbance of the brown sandy silt was limited, either in plan (interior) or in section (trenches). A large modern pit was identified in the south eastern corner of the footings and interior, and was cut from the level just below the made ground forming the base of the Tarmac surface (hoggin layer) to a depth of about 1m. It was unambiguously modern (19th/20th century date) containing brick/tile, ‘china’, post-medieval redware, coal and glass (not retained). No other cut features were observed.
Finds

Apart from late post-medieval and modern finds recovered from the large pit and from made ground elsewhere on the site no artifacts of archaeological interest were noted.

Conclusion

Despite the site lying within what is considered to be the historic core of Sonning, the groundworks observed revealed no finds nor deposits of archaeological interest. Yet although this watching brief and other similar small scale projects carried out in the village are necessarily of limited extent, they do, cumulatively, add to an understanding of the topography of the settlement and its development through time. It is possible therefore that the results of this project, taken with the negative results of the nearby watching brief at the Dower House (Lowe 2008) could indicate that development of this area of the village only took place in relatively recent (post-medieval times).

References

Ford, S, 1987, East Berkshire Archaeological Survey, Berkshire County Couny Coun Dept Highways and Planning Occas Pap 1, Reading
Milbank, D, 2006, New swimming pool, Old Walls, Sonning Lane, Sonning, Berkshire, An archaeological watching brief, Thames Valley Archaeological Services report 06/36b, Reading.
Slade, C F, 1964, ‘A late Neolithic enclosure at Sonning, Berkshire’, Berkshire Archaeol J 61, 4-19
Taylor, A, 2006, Old Walls, Sonning Lane, Sonning, Berkshire, An archaeological evaluation, Thames Valley Archaeological Services report 06/36, Reading.
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Figure 1. Location of site within Sonning and Berkshire.

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Figure 2. Location of site off Pearson Road.

Scale: 1:1250
Figure 3. Location of areas observed in watching brief.
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Figure 4. Representative Section

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Tarmac

Hoggin (made ground)

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Orange Brown Sandy Silt
(Natural geology)

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Limestone (Pliocene to Pleistocene)

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0 1m