

Amey Building Limited

New Somerfield Store, Hungerford, Berkshire

NGR SU 339 687

[Archive]

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Planning Ref. No. 150118

Oxford Archaeological Unit

July 2000

Amey Building Limited

New Somerfield Store, Hungerford, Berkshire

NGR SU 339 687

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Planning Ref. No. 150118

Prepared by:

Date:

Checked by:

Date:

Approved by:

Date:

Oxford Archaeological Unit

July 2000 -

Summary

During 1999 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at the site of a new Somerfield supermarket in Hungerford, West Berkshire (NGR SU 339 687). Modern disturbance was seen to truncate natural deposits in those areas examined; large quantities of made ground were identified in all excavations monitored. No archaeological features were seen; modern finds were identified and examined on site, but were not retained.

1 Introduction

The development proposal (planning application no. 150118) comprised the demolition of the old supermarket building, a part of which formerly was the town's petrol station, and the clearance of the site prior to the construction of a new supermarket building with associated units and access. An archaeological watching brief was required in accordance with the planning consent granted in line with PPG 16, as the site lies in an area of archaeological potential.

The watching brief was commissioned by Amey Building Limited on behalf of Somerfield Stores plc. It was undertaken to a brief set by and a WSI agreed with Babbie Public Services on behalf of West Berkshire District Council.

2 Background

This watching brief is further both to an archaeological field evaluation and a desktop study of the site. The historical and archaeological background to the site has been extensively covered in both documents and as such only a summary is presented below.

The site itself previously has produced no archaeological evidence, and was almost entirely occupied by post-medieval structures prior to its redevelopment. The desktop study (OAU 1998a) concluded that the site might contain archaeological deposits dating from the 12th century onwards, including buildings at the frontage of the site and evidence for burgage plots and other activity to the rear of the site. Prehistoric, Roman and Saxon activity also were thought to be possibilities. This document concluded that, although the site had been subject to a variety of post-medieval disturbance, it was likely that medieval or earlier deposits may survive in any undisturbed areas.

In May 1998 the OAU undertook Phase 1 of the archaeological field evaluation at the site. This evaluation revealed a single feature of possible prehistoric date, and layers containing three prehistoric flint flakes and three small and abraded sherds of Romano-British pottery. The pottery was thought likely to be residual, but the flint flakes may have been in-situ, indicating a prehistoric deposit. Structures relating to the 19th century vertical brewery were encountered to the north of the standing brewery building. Deposits of made ground, of varying thicknesses, were encountered in all the evaluation trenches (OAU 1998b).

The development site lies in the centre of Hungerford, bounded by the High Street to the west, a canal and post office buildings to the north, a track and light industrial units to the east and the railway embankment to the south. The site comprises c. 9 ha in area and lies on the interface between clay with flint inclusions and river valley gravels, underlain by upper chalk, at c. 100 m OD.

3 Aims

The aims of the watching brief were to identify any archaeological remains exposed on site during the course of the works, and to record these to established OAU standards (Wilkinson 1992), in order to secure their preservation by record.

4 Methodology

The watching brief was undertaken by means of separate inspection visits by archaeological supervisors, timed to coincide with major phases of groundwork.

Within the constraints imposed by health and safety considerations the deposits exposed were cleaned, inspected and recorded in plan, section and by colour slide and monochrome print photography. Written records were also made on proforma sheets. Soil description utilises standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types in soil deposits.

5 Results

Groundworks on the site commenced with piling, which was not monitored owing to the minimal disturbance caused. The watching brief was divided into three main phases: the excavation of trenches for ground beams, deep drainage and demolition of the previous Somerfield store. Very similar deposits were identified in each phase of activity.

Ground Beam Trenches.

These were dug to a mean depth of 0.60 m and took place entirely within made ground consisting in the main of a mixture of crushed and whole Type 1 hardcore mixed with deposits of black clinker containing a high percentage of housebrick fragments. Exceptions to this occurred in excavations surrounding double piles, which typically were 2.80 m in depth. Typically these revealed the following sequence; at the base of the cut was seen (3), a soft light brown stony silty clay which was consistent to the base of the cut. This was sealed by deposits of black clinker as described above containing housebrick fragments, corroded iron fittings and fragments of what appeared to be railway sleepers; this deposit varied between 0.30 m and 0.50 m in thickness. This underlay a mixture of whole and crushed Type 1 hardcore, (1), typically 0.85 m thick. This sequence was identical across the area to be occupied by the new supermarket with the exception of the north-east corner of the site, where a structure made of concrete and iron shuttering was seen cutting deposits (1), (2) and (3); it was thought likely that this represented a home-made air raid shelter dating from World War 2.

Deep Drainage.

Excavations for deep drainage typically reached depths of between 2 and 2.5 m and were cut through deposits identical to those described above. Exceptions to this occurred towards the frontage of the site, where (2) was replaced by a firm mid gray slightly silty reworked clay containing crushed and whole red housebrick.

Demolition works.

Excavation works here, comprising foundations for light industrial units and access to the new supermarket, were minimal following the breaking-up and removal of the slab floor from the former supermarket building, and all took place within made ground. Removal of the slab floor revealed a very mixed deposit of gravel and clinker riddled with modern services and cut by drains/soakaways and subterranean fuel tanks from the petrol station formerly occupying this portion of the site.

6 Finds

All finds identified on site were dated to the 19th/20th centuries and comprised a great deal of ceramic building material, metal fragments, plastic piping, fragments of both bottle and window glass and various ceramic fragments, mainly of transfer printed white china and jam/marmalade jars. Several of these bore dates, the earliest of which was 1876.

7 Environmental results

Full consideration was given to environmental sampling, however due to the absence of any significant archaeology no environmental soil samples were taken.

8 Discussion

The watching brief identified and recorded only deposits associated with relatively modern use of the site; it was clear that natural deposits had been truncated across those portions of the site affected by invasive groundworks, particularly at its frontage from previous use of this land as a petrol station, and no archaeological traces were seen. The development did not, however, materially affect the central area of the site, and no opportunity for inspection here was possible. There is therefore at least the possibility for preservation of medieval and/or pre-medieval deposits in this area.

References.

OAU 1998a New Somerfield Store, Hungerford, Berkshire: Archaeological Desktop Study.

OAU 1998b New Somerfield Store, Hungerford, Berkshire. Archaeological Evaluation Report.

Wilkinson, D (ed) 1992 Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual, (First edition, August 1992).



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES

Tel: 01865 263800 Fax: 01865 793496

email: postmaster@oau-oxford.com www.oau-oxford.com



Director and Chief Executive: David Jennings B.A., M.I.F.A. Oxford Archaeological Unit Limited.
Private Limited Company Number: 1618597 Registered Charity Number: 285627.
Registered Office: Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES