

# Pippin's School, Colnbrook Berkshire

NGR TQ 035 768

Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Oxford Archaeological Unit

May 1997

PIPPINS SCHOOL

**Pippins School, Raymond Close,  
Colnbrook, Berkshire**

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## 1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 *The Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a watching brief during the groundwork preceding construction of a new school-block at Pippins School, Colnbrook, Berkshire. No archaeological remains were observed.*

## 2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Between March 3 and 14 1997, an archaeological Watching Brief was carried out at and on behalf of Pippins School, Raymond Close, Colnbrook, Berkshire (TQ035768) by the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU). Groundwork, carried out by Leander Construction, sub-contractors to W.S. Atkins, was monitored by OAU archaeologists. Prior to the construction of a new three-storey building and carpark on land adjacent to the school, topsoil was machine-stripped and trenches for footings were excavated.

## 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Pippins School is situated in Raymond Close, off the Bath Road (modern A4), which runs through Poyle. Historically the site was in Middlesex, but has passed to Surrey and, most recently to Berkshire. The site is in the Colne Valley, to the west of the River Colne - possibly a pre-English river name (Ekwall, 1928) - and north of the Poyle Channel which connects the Wraysbury River and the Colne Brook. Situated on the low-lying gravel terraces of east Berkshire and west Middlesex, and above the alluvial plain of the Colne, the site is 4.5km north of the Thames at c.21m OD. South and west of Poyle are the main reservoirs for London (The Queen Mother, Wraysbury, King George VI and Staines) and many gravel pits. These have produced much evidence of prehistoric occupation of the region, as has the construction of Heathrow Airport, to the east.
- 3.2 Excavations at Egham, Staines (Robertson-Mackay, 1987), Heathrow (O'Connell, 1986; Grimes & Close-Brooks, 1993), Stanwell (O'Connell, 1990) and Runnymede (Longley, 1980) have produced much evidence for settlements and monuments in the area from the Neolithic through to the Bronze Age. Stanway cursus, which crosses Heathrow, (O'Connell, 1986) and Caesar's Camp (Grimes & Close-Brooks, 1993) excavated prior to the construction of the airport are important early prehistoric sites. Further Neolithic evidence has been recovered from Stanwell Moor, the environs of Wraysbury Reservoir and south of Horton. A number of excavated Bronze Age enclosures and riverside sites are recorded from Stanwell, Egham, Runnymede and Staines Moor. This evidence and the cropmarks recorded from air photographs (see below) suggest that the land around the site was very much a focus for prehistoric activity. It has been commented that "Bronze Age finds are ubiquitous, and this period would seem to have witnessed the

most dense spread of occupation in the area before the later Middle Ages” (Longley, 1976).

- 3.3 Roman evidence has been recovered from Staines, where “a small town developed at the point where the Roman road from London to Silchester crossed the Thames” (Longley, 1976). West of Poyle another Roman road ran from Staines to Lower Winchendon, Bucks. To the north of Poyle at Larbourne Farm, further Roman settlement is known to have existed. Romano-British pottery has been collected from fields to the south of Colnbrook, and coin finds have also been recorded from the surrounding area.
- 3.4 Horton and Stanwell provide the main foci of medieval settlement in the area, although Colnbrook is first mentioned in a charter of 1106. Wraysbury has evidenced medieval (Astill & Lobb, 1989) and more recently, prehistoric settlement. Colnbrook to the west of Poyle has a number of Listed Buildings (Grade II/II\*) dating from between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. During the medieval and early post-medieval periods the environs of the site appear to have been devoted to arable and pastoral fields. By the eighteenth century surveys by Gardiner (1748) and Roque (1754) indicate that the area round the site had been enclosed and divided into small strip fields. Although most of Poyle dates to the twentieth century, the remains of Poyle Manor, a Georgian moated house, are located between Manor Farm and Poyle Lodge off Poyle Road. Post-medieval moated sites have also been recorded at Colnbrook (Mildridge Farm) and Horton (Berkin Manor). The moats associated with these sites are garden features. A number of Corporation of London Tax Posts, defining the boundaries of the Corporation in regard to the importing of coal and wine and duties payable on these, exist in the vicinity of the site. These corresponded with the limits of the Metropolitan Police District. One example is present on land formerly owned by Pippin School, to the north of the site.
- 3.5 Air photographs taken in the 1970s show a number of features in the area surrounding the site. To the north-west of the site, north of the Colnbrook bypass and south of Sutton End Farm, parallel linear ditches and a rectilinear enclosure were recorded in 1994, although background geology masked the precise nature of the cropmarks. South of Poyle, and north of Wraysbury Reservoir a number of cropmarks were recorded in the 1970s (Longley, 1976); these include linear and ring ditches, pits and enclosures. These sites have been destroyed by gravel extraction. The air photographs were taken at about the same time as or later than the construction of much of the housing and trading estates which surround the site. It is therefore possible that these had already destroyed much unrecorded evidence for archaeological activity in the area.

#### 4. AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 OAU carried out the work to a Brief set by Babbie Public Services on behalf of Berkshire Local Planning Authority, according to a Written Scheme of Investigation produced by OAU. The watching brief was carried out to recover evidence of the archaeological potential and significance of the site. This was achieved by the monitoring of the initial stripping of the site and of the subsequent excavation of the trenches for foundations. While groundwork would not be impeded by archaeological investigation of features which were uncovered, the delay between excavation and laying of the foundations would be sufficient for a full investigation to be carried out.
- 4.2 Excavation was monitored, and trench sections were cleaned and examined for archaeological activity. Spoil-heaps were also examined. Trenches were excavated by machine for the footings of a three-storey annexe to Pippin School. The external trenches were 0.65m wide; the internal trenches were 0.45m wide. Trenches were excavated to a depth of 0.50-0.70m below modern ground-level, the level at the bottom of the deeper trenches was c.20.25m OD. In addition to the foundation trenches, two holes, 9m square and 4m deep were excavated to the south of the proposed building for soakaways.

#### 5. RESULTS

- 5.1 The site was initially stripped of 0.20m of topsoil. At the west side of the site some demolition rubble, deposited after 1934, was observed on the surface. The OS (1934) of West London shows a building here. Elsewhere, no archaeological remains or material was observed during stripping of the topsoil or in any sections of the foundation trenches.
- 5.2 Within the footprint of the building all trenches were excavated to approximately the same depth, c.21.25m OD. At this depth, the top of a deposit of mixed, unsorted gravels containing a number of lenses of silty sand was encountered (4). This deposit was visible in all the external footing trenches, and most of the internal. Overlying this clean, sandy gravel was a layer of gravel mixed with a mid-brown silty clay (2), 0.35m thick. In the south-west corner of the building, the foundation trenches exposed a deposit of silty sand (3) between the clean gravel and the 'dirty', which may represent a former channel. This deposit increased in depth from 0.01m to 0.20m over a distance of c.1m. The dirty gravel was overlain by a layer of mid-brown slightly silty clay topsoil (1) 0.20m thick.
- 5.3 The two soakaways were excavated to a depth of c.17m OD. The stratigraphy of the deposits in the holes was similar to that observed elsewhere: clean, mixed and unsorted gravels (5) and (4), overlain by dirty gravel (2), overlain in turn by topsoil. The more westerly of the soakaways, it had been expected, might have evidenced further information concerning the postulated channel. Despite the presence of a grey gravel deposit (6), this cannot assuredly be associated with the silty sand (3) representing a possible palaeochannel.

- 5.4 A service trench was excavated from the new building to the east. The total length of the trench was about 50m. Only a small portion was monitored, due to the impossibility of leaving the trench open overnight. In the pit excavated for a manhole, a sequence of deposits was observed. This sequence consisted of clean gravel (4), 1.19m below ground level. This was overlain by dirty gravel (2), 0.40m thick, these two deposits are the same as those observed to the east, which were c.0.20m below ground level. Overlying the dirty gravel were alluvial deposits. The earlier was a slightly gravelly silty clay (12), which was overlain by a much stiffer, very slightly silty, clay (11). This, in turn was overlain by nineteenth-century demolition (10), probably associated with that observed to the east. Overlying this, was a number of make-up and road surface layers (7-9) of Raymond Way.

## 6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The foundation trenches of the proposed building were excavated into the natural gravel. Despite the high density of archaeological occupation in the surrounding area, no features or even stray finds were recovered during the groundwork. The site had been 'greenfield', used for arable and pasture since the eighteenth century at least. This normally would entail the preservation of archaeological deposits, if they were to be present. The demolition deposit can probably be associated with a building visible on pre-war maps (OS, 1934) of the area and probably can be dated to the nineteenth or early twentieth century.
- 6.2 It is possible that the lenses of silty sand observed in section on the south-west corner of the proposed building may be associated with an early river-channel. However, these deposits were not recovered 5m south-west of the corner of the proposed building where they were first observed. Their presence some 20m to the west may, however be due to the water course being either seasonal or not particularly important in the hydrology of the Colne Valley. It is unfortunate that it was not possible to examine these deposits in further depth, but the trenches were not excavated and backfilled under archaeological supervision. This does not permit observations concerning this putative palaeochannel to be developed any further.
- 6.3 Investigation shows that a generally low archaeological potential can be assigned to the site.

Gwilym Williams  
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20 March 1997

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## HISTORIC MAP SOURCES

- Gardiner's plan of the Parish of Stanwell (1748)
- Roque's map of the County of Middlesex (1754)
- Ordnance Survey 4th edition 25" (1934)



## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1

#### Archaeological Context Inventory

| Context | Type  | width (m) | thickness (m)       | Comment                                    | Finds |
|---------|-------|-----------|---------------------|--|-------|
| (1)     | layer | 40m+      | 0.40m (max)         | topsoil                                    | no    |
| (2)     | layer | 20m+      | 0.35m (min)         | poss. arable/<br>pastoral                  | no    |
| (3)     | layer | c.1m+     | 0.01-0.20m<br>(min) | possible<br>palaeochannel                  | no    |
| (4)     | layer | 20m+      | c.2m (max)          | 3rd/Taplow<br>Gravel<br>Terrace            | no    |
| (5)     | layer | unknown   | unknown             | unknown<br>gravels                         | no    |
| (6)     | layer | 3m+       | 0.30m               | unknown<br>gravels                         | no    |
| (7)     | layer |           | 0.09m               | tarmac                                     | no    |
| (8)     | layer | 2m+       | 0.22m               | hardcore                                   | no    |
| (9)     | layer | 2m+       | 0.04m               | concrete base<br>for carpark               | no    |
| (10)    | layer | 2m+       | 0.25m               | demolition of<br>c. 19th-Cent.<br>building | no    |
| (11)    | layer | 2m+       | 0.12m               | alluvium                                   | no    |
| (12)    | layer | 2m+       | 0.07m               | alluvial<br>deposit                        | no    |

### APPENDIX 2

#### Gazetteer of Archaeological Sites in Study Area

| OAU Number | NAR Number        | Grid Reference | Description  |
|------------|-------------------|----------------|--|
| 1          | RRX 39            | TQ 02 76       | Roman Road running from Harmondsworth, Middx. to Lower Winchendon, Bucks. via Staines ( <i>Pontum</i> ).   |
| 2          | NAR TQ 07<br>NW 1 | TQ 0295 7643   | Site of Poyle Manor House. Described by RCHME as ruinous and deserted, the moat may be medieval, or more likely a post-medieval garden feature. The house was substantially rebuilt in the 18th century. The moat is a brick- and stone-revetted ornamental water feature; there is no evidence that it extended to the north and east of the house. |
| 3          | NAR TQ 07<br>NW 3 | TQ 0188 7717   | Mildridge Farm, site of a post-medieval homestead moat; the moat is probably a garden feature. All that survives is the east and part of the west arm. Formerly an orchard, now a market garden. RCHME comments that it is "A doubtful antiquity".   |

|   |                    |              |   |
|---|--------------------|--------------|---|
| 4 | NAR TQ 07<br>NW 10 | TQ 0183 7594 | Berkin Manor, 19th century farmhouse surrounded by an L-shaped moat, which is a garden feature, probably contemporary with the farmhouse. Traditionally, it was rented to Milton's father in 1632, though Milton was neither born nor did he die here. This house is alleged to have been demolished in the 18th century, but for a brick dovecote, though no evidence for either has been recovered. |
| 5 | NAR TQ 07<br>NW 31 | TQ 0410 7540 | Complex of cropmarks including enclosures, ditches, pits and ring ditches. Destroyed by gravel extraction.  |
| 6 | NAR TQ 07<br>NW 32 | TQ 0250 7595 | Cropmarks including a subrectangular enclosure, linear ditches and a ring ditch. Destroyed by gravel extraction.  |
| 7 | NAR TQ 07<br>NW 33 | TQ 0229 7580 | Cropmarks including linear ditches and a possible rectangular enclosure. Destroyed by gravel extraction.  |
| 8 | NAR TQ 07<br>NW 45 | TQ 022 777   | Cropmarks including parallel linears and a rectilinear enclosure. Heavy geological masking  |

COPIP 97



scale 1:20,000

TQ 07NW  
Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey's 1:10,000 map of 1989 with  
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Figure 1

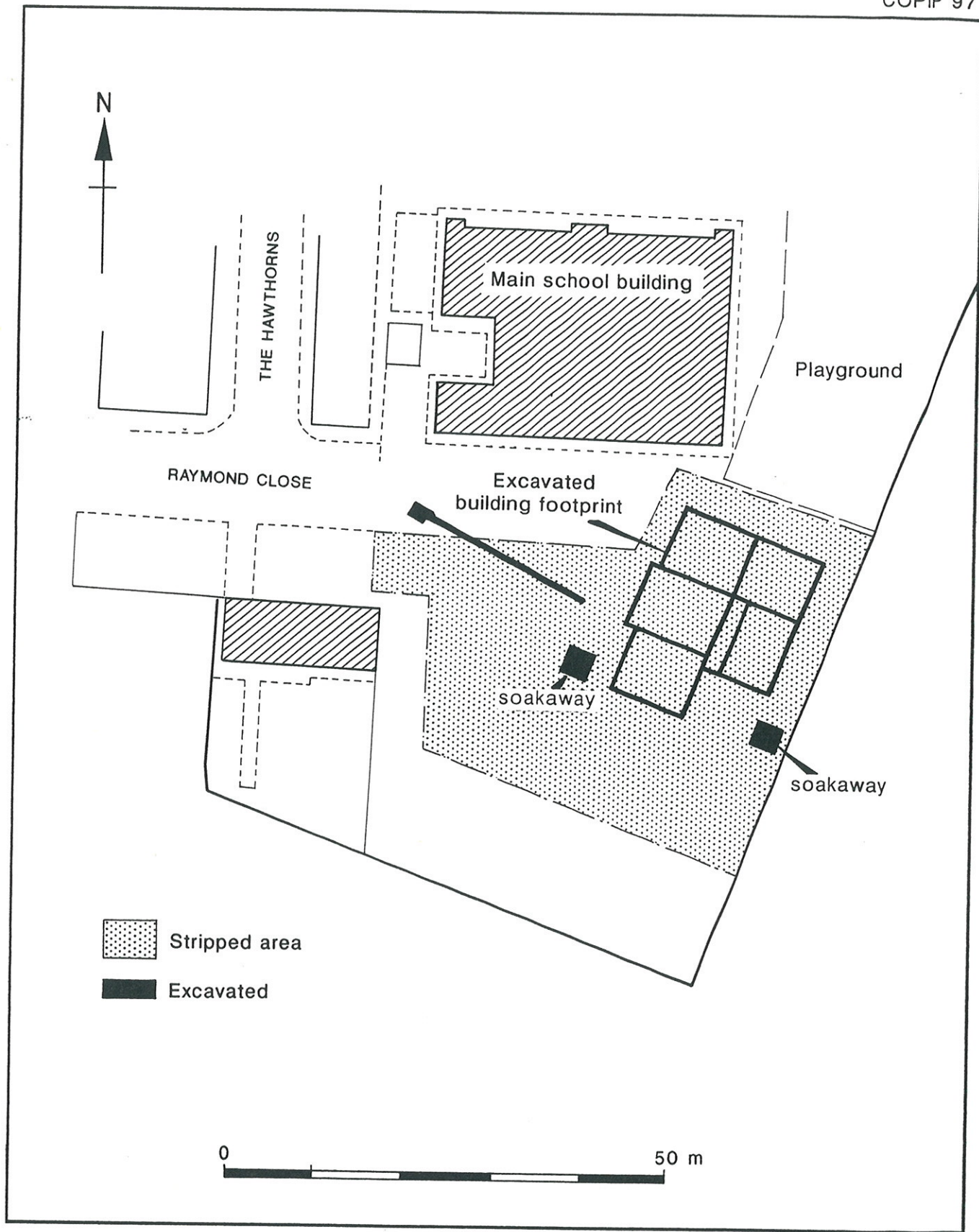


Figure 2



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