

Land Adjacent to Aspen  
Oxford Road  
Donnington  
Newbury  
Berkshire



**Archaeological  
Watching Brief Report**



November 2007

**Client: Palady Developments Ltd**

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# Land Adjacent to “Aspen”, Oxford Road, Donnington, Newbury, Berkshire

## *ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT*

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## SUMMARY

*On November 8th 2007, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief on land adjacent to "Aspen", Oxford Road, Donnington, Newbury, Berkshire (NGR: SU 4676 6916). The work was commissioned by Palady Developments Ltd in advance of the construction of a new dwelling on the site. The watching brief revealed deposits of garden soil overlying the natural clay. Lenses of red clay were noticed in the surface in the natural clay, these proved to be geological in origin rather than archaeological upon investigation. No significant archaeology was observed.*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 On November 8th 2007, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief on land adjacent to "Aspen", Oxford road, Donnington, Newbury, Berkshire (NGR: SU 4676 6916). The work was commissioned by Palady Developments Ltd in respect of a planning application for the construction of a single new dwelling (Planning Application No. 05/010061/FULD)
- 1.1.2 A project brief was set by Sarah Orr of West Berkshire County Council requiring that an archaeological watching brief be maintained during the topsoil strip of the site.
- 1.1.3 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief (OA, 2007).

#### 1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The village of Donnington is located 1.5 km north of the town of Newbury (Fig. 1). The site is situated in the centre of the village on the west side of Oxford Road. The development area straddles a ridge of high ground running alongside the Oxford Road, with the eastern edge of the site sloping down towards the Oxford Road and the western edge sloping down to the B4494 Wantage road. The site occupies an area of 880 m<sup>2</sup>, with the lowest point of the site lying at 99 m above OD and the highest at 104 m above OD. The underlying geology is a mottled clay of the Reading Beds sequence overlying a spur of sand that follows the line of the B4494 Wantage Road (Geological Survey of Great Britain, sheet no 267, 1971).

#### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared for the WSI for the project (OA, 2007) and is reproduced below.
- 1.3.2 The background to the site was prepared following telephone conversations with Sarah Orr of the Archaeology Service for West Berkshire District Council. This has identified the potential for Roman remains based upon Victorian references to

'Romano-British pottery and burnt circles' being noted from the adjacent plot to the north, now called Rotherwood. These could suggest the presence of a cremation cemetery although its exact extent is not known. Aerial images of the area to the immediate north also suggest some activity although the precise form of these crop/soilmarks is not known.

## 2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To preserve by record any archaeological deposits or features that may be disturbed or destroyed during the course of the development.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

### 2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The site was stripped using a 5 tonne mechanical excavator fitted with a 1.5 m wide toothless grading bucket. The removed material was stripped off in spits under constant archaeological supervision until either undisturbed natural or the first significant archaeological horizon was encountered.
- 2.2.2 A plan showing the extent of the work was maintained at a scale of 1:100 (Fig. 2, Plan) and any recorded sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20 (Fig. 2, Section 1). All excavations and recorded sections were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was also made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Field Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 The underlying natural clay, (3), was encountered at a depth of between 0.25 m and 0.4 m below the current ground level (Fig. 2, Section 1). This was a light orange-brown clay with occasional irregular areas (*c.*0.8 m across) of red clay appearing on its surface. This was overlaid by a layer of yellow-brown silt clay (2) measuring between 0.1 m and 0.2 m in depth. This deposit contained much chalk flecking and produced fragments of 18th and 19th century pottery suggesting that it was an earlier garden soil.
- 3.1.2 Sealing the site was an overall layer of dark brown clay loam (1), measuring between 0.2 m and 0.3 m in depth. This was the present day topsoil and turf.

### 3.2 **Finds**

3.2.1 Find were recovered both during the stripping process and from examination of the spoil heaps. Numerous fragments of 19th/ 20th century brick and tile were recovered from layers 1 and 2. These were probably associated with the construction of the buildings on the adjoining plots and their presence was noted but they were not retained. Fragments of 18th and 19th century domestic pottery were recovered from layers 1 and 2, and these were retained, however no earlier dating evidence was recovered.

### 3.3 **Palaeo-environmental remains**

3.3.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were encountered during the course of the investigation.

## 4 **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

4.1.1 The watching brief found no evidence for the continuation of the burnt areas and Romano-British pottery noted in the Victorian references extending into the development area. It is possible that the lenses of red clay observed in the surface of the natural clay may have been mis-interpreted as burnt areas in the past, indeed the writer was unsure until further investigation showed them to be less than 0.1 m deep and geological in origin. The dating evidence recovered suggests that the area had previously formed part of a domestic garden prior to construction of the current buildings.

4.1.2 No continuation of the cropmarks noted in aerial photographs to the north were observed during the course of the watching brief.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Layer	0.15 m - 0.25 m	Modern garden soil and turf	Tile, brick, pottery	C20th
2	Layer	0.15 m - 0.2 m	Earlier garden soil	Tile, pottery	C18th/ C19th
3	Layer	> 0.2 m	Natural clay	-	-

## APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

IFA, 2001 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

OA, 2007 *Land adjacent to Aspen, Oxford Road, Donnington, Newbury, Berkshire : Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

OAU, 1992 *Fieldwork Manual (ed. D Wilkinson)*

## APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

**Site name:** Land Adjacent to Aspen, Oxford Road, Donnington, Newbury, Berkshire

**Site code:** DONLA 07

**Grid reference:** SU 4676 6916

**Type of watching brief:** Machine stripping of topsoil

**Date and duration of project:** 8th November 2007, 1 day

**Area of site:** 880 m<sup>2</sup>

**Summary of results:** The watching brief observed layers of garden soil overlying natural clay. No continuation of the burnt areas and Romano-British pottery noted in the Victorian references were observed

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with West Berkshire Heritage Service in due course, under accession number NEBYM:2007.155.







Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location

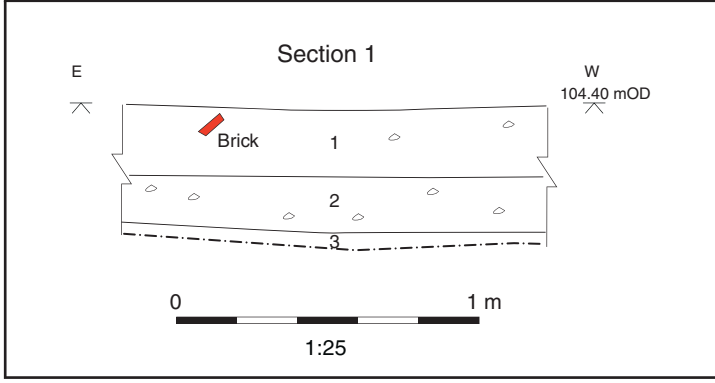


Figure 2 : Site plan and section