

**Beechcroft Construction Limited**

**Cook's Nurseries, Remenham Hill, Berkshire**

*NGR SU 7658 8252*

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT**

**Planning Ref. No. 98/67458/F**

**Oxford Archaeological Unit**

**January 2000**

Beechcroft Construction Limited

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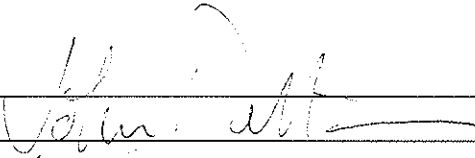
NGR SU 7658 8252

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT**


Planning Ref. No. 98/67458/F

Prepared by: Kayt Brown & John Dalton

Date: 26/1/2000

Checked by: 

Date: 11/2/00

Approved by:  Head of Fieldwork

Date: 21/2/2000

**Oxford Archaeological Unit**

**January 2000**

## ***Summary***

*During 1999 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief on the site of the former Cook's Nurseries, Remenham Hill, Berkshire (NGR SU 7658 8252). No archaeological features were seen and no finds were retrieved.*

### **1 Introduction (Fig. 1)**

The development proposal (planning application no. 98/67458/F) comprised demolition of the existing garden centre, making up the existing ground level with 1 m of Type 1 hardcore, which was deposited across the majority of the site, prior to the construction of twelve sheltered housing units and a secretary's office. An archaeological watching brief was required in accordance with the planning consent granted under PPG 16.

The watching brief was commissioned by Beechcroft Construction Limited. It was undertaken in consultation and to a WSI agreed with Babbie Public Services Division on behalf of Wokingham District Council; a brief was not prepared for this project.

### **2 Background**

Although no known sites of archaeological interest have been identified within the development area, finds have been made in the immediate vicinity. Prehistoric and Saxon finds have been pulled from the River Thames in the area to the south of the bridge. Henley-on-Thames itself is a medieval town dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> century and the area on the opposite bank to the development site lay within the confines of the medieval town. Two cropmark sites are also known c. 1 km to the south. Recent investigations at Aspect Golf Course c. 1.5 km to the east of the development site revealed an area of early Iron Age occupation and a series of early Roman ditches. These possibly formed an enclosure in association with several pits and postholes. Little else is known about the archaeology of the area to the immediate west of the development site; this probably is due to its use as historic common land and subsequently as parkland.

The site is located on the east bank of the River Thames, on the west side of the Wargrave Road and to the south of Henley Bridge. The site previously was occupied by Cook's Nurseries, a garden centre; a geotechnical inspection immediately prior to development identified possible evidence of previous construction, comprising a channel or possible waterway, including steel sheet and timber king posts (Simpson Associates 1998). The underlying geology is alluvium over valley gravel (BGS sheet 254) and the site lies at c. 32.5 m OD at its east end and c. 31.5 m OD by the rivers' edge.

### **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 maintained by means of separate inspection visits, undertaken by an archaeological supervisor.

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 (Fig. 2)**

The similarity of deposits seen and absence of any significant archaeology allows for a general description of the site rather than discussing areas individually. The north-eastern, highest, half of the site was not made up with Type 1 hardcore, and it was here that excavations commenced. Piling operations, due to their archaeologically uninformative nature, were not monitored. Foundation trenches were dug to an average depth of 0.45 m into chalky fill comprising dumped waste from the construction of the Wargrave Road and very mixed demolition deposits which obscured this portion of the site; these comprised dumps of red brick, tile, stone, concrete and various pieces of corroded and uncorroded ironwork mixed in with cement rubble and redundant services, most of which were contained within blue plastic piping. This material occurred in a general spread across a little under one half of the site; glass, wood and plastic fragments also were seen within the trench sections and in plan. Excavations in this area of the site were insufficiently deep to clear these deposits.

The remaining, lower, half of the site adjoining the river, was made up to a depth of c. 1 m, and the majority of excavation took place within this material. The only exceptions to this were excavations for soakaways which reached an average depth of 3 m. The sequence identified in all of them was identical and ran as follows:

- (1) - Type 1 hardcore, to an average 1 m thickness.
- (2) - a thin deposit of mixed demolition debris, on average between 0.10 m and 0.15 m thickness.
- (3) - light-mid brown silty alluvial clay loam with 20% fine silt and 10% fine-medium subrounded gravel, on average approximately 0.50 m thickness.
- (4) - fine-coarse subrounded light yellow/white natural gravel, reached at an average depth of between 1.6 m and 2 m; ground water was reached at an average depth of 2 m, and settled at an average depth of 0.95 m.

Neither archaeological features nor any finds were retrieved from any of the soakaway excavations.

## **6 Finds**

No finds were retrieved during the course of the watching brief.

## **7 Environmental results**

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

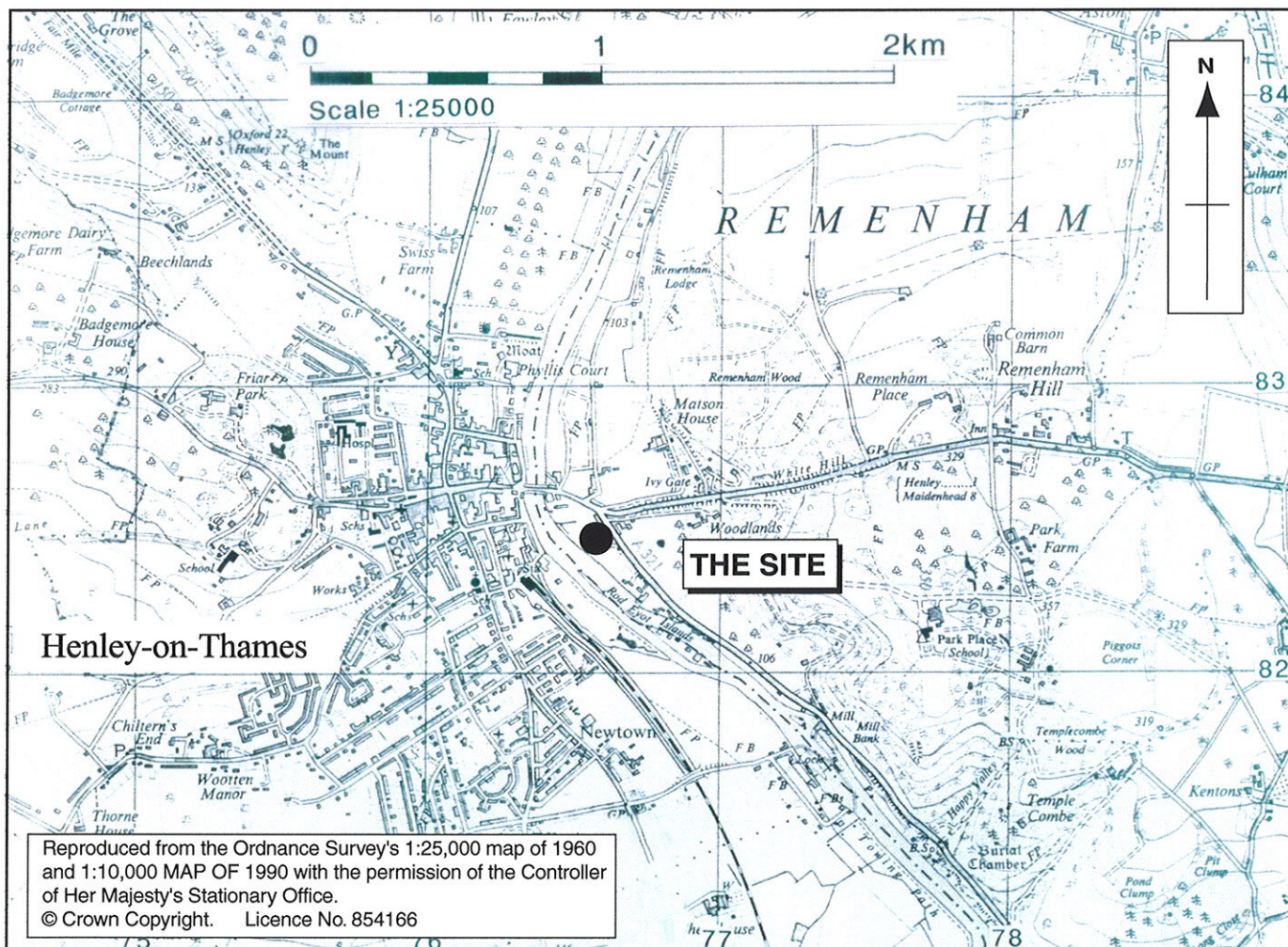
## **8 Discussion**

No significant archaeology was identified during the course of the watching brief; this is at least in part a reflection of the failure of the majority of the excavations undertaken to penetrate below the spread of demolition debris or the hardcore makeup. Those excavations which exceeded this depth proceeded through detritus from the demolished garden centre and the Type 1 directly into alluvial natural with neither archaeological deposits nor features being seen. Particular attention was paid to identifying traces of those features seen during the 1998 geotechnical investigations, however during that exercise the top of the sheet metal was seen in TP 5 at a depth of 1.3 m and thus lay below the base of dig for excavations in this area of the site; nothing of these features was seen and it is presumed that they remain intact, with the exception of possible damage from piling. One benefit of the site makeup and the piled foundations is that the majority of it remains *in-situ* and undisturbed, particularly that portion which adjoins the river.

## **References.**

Simpson Associates October 1998 Site Inspection at Cook's Nurseries Site, Wargrave Road, Remenham.

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



Site location map

Figure 1

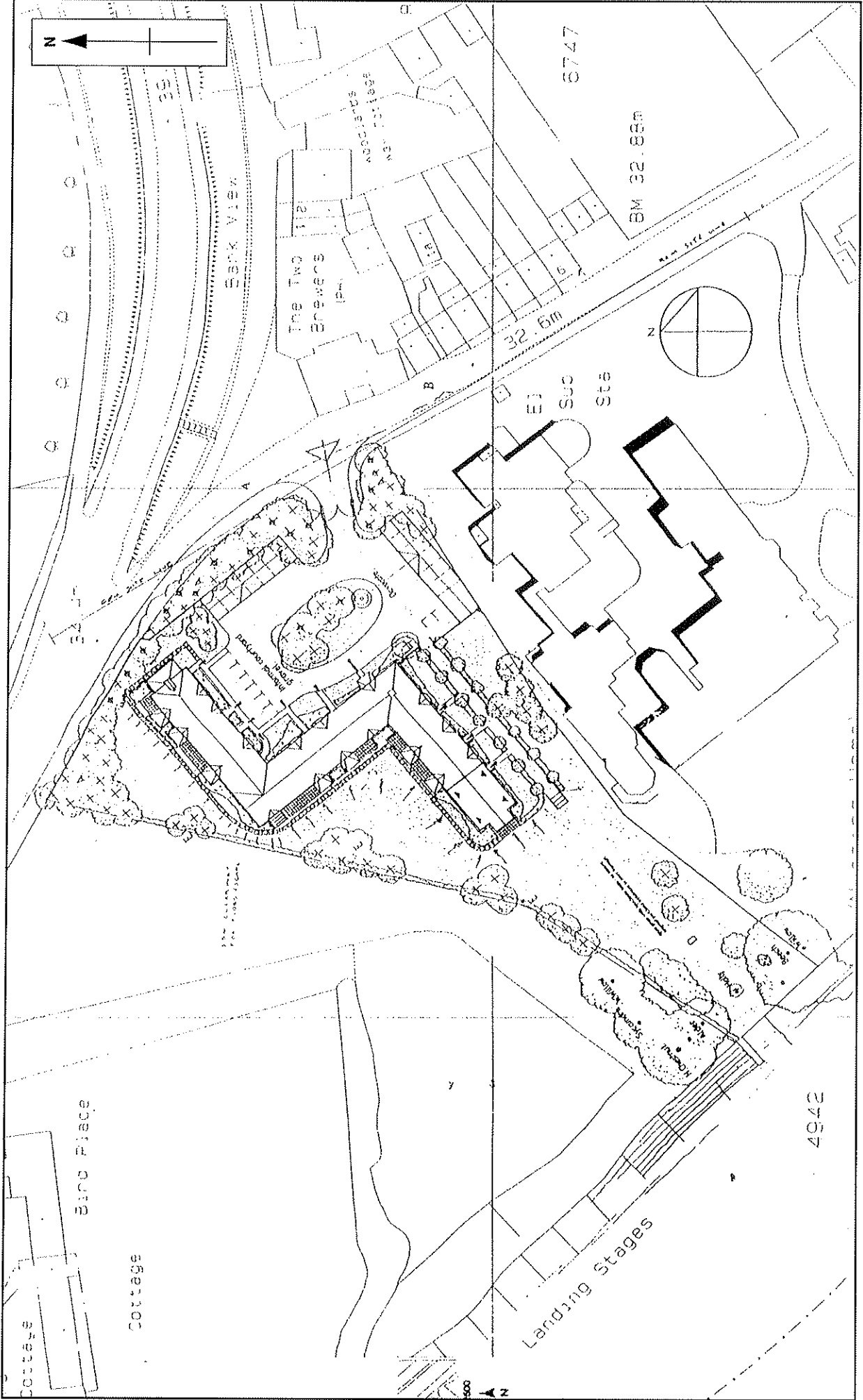


Figure 2

Site plan

scale 1:500



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