

RP & C Howse

Cheyne Lane, Bampton, Oxfordshire

NGR SP 3142 0305

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Planning Ref. No. 0101, 0102/94

Oxford Archaeological Unit

March 2000

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Date: 14/3/00

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Date: *15/3/00*

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Date: *17/3/2000*

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Summary

In 1998/1999 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at Cheyne Lane, Bampton, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 3142 0305). Several tree holes and a substantial probable gravel quarry, backfilled with assorted Victoriana, were identified.

1 Introduction (Fig. 1)

The development proposal (planning application no. 0101, 0102/94) comprised the construction of a new single dwelling, with associated services, and garage on land at Cheyne Lane, Bampton. An archaeological watching brief was required in accordance with PPG 16 due to the presence of known sites of archaeological interest within the immediate vicinity of the development.

The watching brief was commissioned by R P & C Howse on their own behalf. It was undertaken to a brief set by and a WSI agreed with the Deputy County Archaeological Officer.

2 Background

Bampton was the site of a battle in 614, but there is no further reference to it until Domesday Book in 1086 at which time it was one of the richest places in the country, valued at £ 80. The village today has a very simple plan; three main streets converging in a triangular market place fronting a network of lanes to the rear. There is no trace of medieval planning. This pattern may possibly indicate the settlement's early growth and importance, but there is not enough evidence to estimate the size of the early medieval town. Similarly, very little is known of the origins, nature or extent of the town in the Saxon period, and the same is true of the Roman period. The OAU has dug at Calais Farm, in the village, and the Oxford University Archaeological Society has excavated in the churchyard. The church, which was once a Minster, is one of the largest in West Oxfordshire and now is largely a cruciform late Norman structure, remodelled in the 13th and 14th centuries. The tower has some Saxon herringbone masonry as part of its fabric and may possibly have been the western tower of an earlier church.

There are no known archaeological features within the development area. In September 1989 an evaluation at Folly House identified the presence of D'Oilly Manor. Archaeological features relating to the manor are thought to survive in the vicinity of the development area (OAU 1989). The Inclosure Award of 1821 identifies two parcels of land as "Doiles" and "Doiles Orchard"; the south-western edge of "Doiles Orchard" is aligned with Cheyne Lane. An Anglo Saxon Grubenhaus, with pottery of the same period, was also identified; whilst such features are found throughout the Thames Valley, this is one of only a very few in the area of Bampton. It is possible that this Grubenhaus was a part of the nucleus which later grew into the Domesday and Medieval town; the absence of the more usual beaten earth floor within it would suggest that there was a timber floor.

The development site is located on the south side of Bridge Street (the A4095) and on the western side of Cheyne Lane. It lies at approximately 69 m OD (centred) and the geology is a loam overlying limestone gravel. Previous land use on site was as a joinery works and a builder's yard.

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

Due to the possible presence of Anglo Saxon features on the site initial groundworks, comprising levelling and the excavation of footings for the garage and house, were intensively monitored in the first instance, with the level of subsequent monitoring being determined by the results obtained. Monitoring was achieved by means of separate inspection visits to the site. All levelling and excavation was by JCB mechanical excavator fitted with a blade and a narrow toothless bucket; a toothed bucket was used where the level of the base of dig was below the upper horizon of the limestone gravel natural.

Within the constraints imposed by health and safety considerations the deposits and features 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

All structures comprising the builder's yard and joinery works had been demolished and rubble was being cleared from site prior to levelling works at the commencement of the watching brief. The ground surface following demolition had a general spread of crushed red brick, glass, metal fragments and tile; a portion of this material was removed during levelling works.

Generally the soil type was a sequence of loams over the limestone gravel natural, this sequence being identical across the areas of both the house and the garage with one or two localised exceptions. The similarity of deposits allows for a general description across the site, rather than describing individual areas.

The earliest deposit seen was the limestone gravel natural, numbered as (2) across the site, it comprised a light orange/yellow sandy fine-coarse subrounded gravel; on average 0.56 m of this material was removed in order to reach the base of dig. Generally this was sealed by (1), approximately 0.24 m of heavily disturbed mid gray silty clay loam containing high percentages of modern bottle glass, brick, tile and metal fragments in random distributions. Exceptions to this sequence occurred in the north-east and south-west corners of the garage footings and in the south-west and north-east corners of the house footings.

Two small tree-holes were identified in the south-west corner of the garage footings, and one further at the north-east corner; this feature was cut by a rectangular pit which was filled with concrete and brick fragments and which proved to be a socket for one of the posts which supported the gates to the builder's yard.

One further tree-hole was seen at the north-east corner of the house footings. Two further features were seen at the south-west corner of the house footings; one was one further tree-hole. The second was a substantial pit, cutting away the natural gravel to a depth of 1.80 m. The upper fill was essentially a mixture of (1) and (2); the lower fill, was an almost solid mass of bottle glass, white china and red brick pieces. The pit appeared to be cut from the upper horizon of the reduced ground surface; although some slight truncation is possible due to the levelling of the site. This portion of the footings was dug through the pit until gravel was reached; it then was immediately filled with concrete owing to the extremely unstable nature of the sections and rapidly rising groundwater.

6 Finds

The assemblage of finds retrieved on site spanned a date bracket from the mid-late 19th century to the present day and comprised in the main highly abraded fragments of white china, some of which bore a transfer-printed willow pattern, and sundry fragments of bottle glass. One fractured glass battery, probably from an early motorcycle, was also retrieved.

7 Environmental results

Due to the absence of significant archaeological features, no environmental soil samples were taken.

8 Discussion

It is thought likely that the large backfilled pit represents quarrying for high quality gravel, probably at some point in the late 19th or early 20th century. All other features seen relate either to disturbance of the natural by tree-holes, unsurprising given the close proximity of the site to "Doiles Orchard", or to previous use of the site as a joinery works/builder's yard.

References.

OAU 1989 Folly House, Bampton, Oxfordshire. Archaeological Evaluation Report.

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

BAMCL 98



Figure 1: site location



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