

**Alfred McAlpine Partnership Housing Ltd**

**Waterman's Road, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire**

*NGR SP 7660 8145/SP 7655 8150*

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT**

**Oxford Archaeological Unit**

**September 1999**

Alfred McAlpine Partnership Housing Ltd

Waterman's Road, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire

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## ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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Oxford Archaeological Unit

September 1999

## **Summary**

*Between June and August 1999 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief on two adjacent sites at Waterman's Road, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 7660 8145/SP 7655 8150). No archaeological features were seen and no finds were retrieved.*

## **1 Introduction**

The development proposal comprised the construction of 54 new homes on two adjacent sites to the south and south-west of Waterman's Road, Henley-on-Thames. An archaeological watching brief was required by South Oxfordshire District Council, in accordance with the planning consent granted under PPG 16.

The watching brief was commissioned by Alfred McAlpine Partnership Housing Ltd. The County Archaeological Service did not prepare a brief for the watching brief, however it was undertaken to a WSI agreed with the County Archaeological Officer.

## **2 Background (Fig. 1)**

Although no known sites of archaeological interest have been identified within the development area, finds have been made in the surrounding vicinity. Prehistoric and Saxon finds have been pulled from the River Thames in the area immediately to the south of the town's bridge. Henley-on-Thames itself is a medieval town dating from the 12<sup>th</sup>-century and the development site lay just outside its historic core. Henry II bought land for buildings in Henley in 1179. The town and manor were granted to Robert Harcourt in 1199 and in 1205 the town received a pavage grant. The church (a chapel of Benson) is mentioned in 1204 and the first reference to the bridge is in 1234. A merchant guild is mentioned in 1269 and it seems that most of the street plan of the town was established in the 13<sup>th</sup>-century. London merchants owned property in the town (warehouses) in the 14<sup>th</sup>-century which may reflect the prosperity of the grain trade and transhipment of goods downriver. A number of medieval and 16<sup>th</sup>-century buildings still survive in the market place (Rodwell 1974, Map 3) and the many surviving 18<sup>th</sup>-century buildings reflect the towns' importance as a coaching stop.

Several excavations have been undertaken by the OAU in the centre of Henley. In 1984 a ?13<sup>th</sup>-century hearth, normally found in early medieval hall type structures, was excavated at 12-16 Market Place. Twelfth century occupation was identified at the Rectory (Durham, undated). Excavations at 20 Market Place revealed a possible Coaching Inn with medieval antecedents (Durham and Gibson, undated). Excavations carried out by the OAU in 1993 on the Waitrose site located on the western side of Bell Street produced extensive and significant new evidence for the evolution of Henley. Here a palaeochannel was sealed by a Roman building lying immediately adjacent to Bell Street and associated with a metallised surface containing 1<sup>st</sup>-century AD pottery. This was sealed by a layer of dark earth containing Saxon pottery. Medieval stone buildings that fronted onto Bell Street were also found as well as a sequence of medieval property boundaries and refuse pits. Abundant post-medieval remains were also recorded.

Two cropmark sites are also known in the area, lying *c.* 1 km to the south. Recent investigations at Aspect Golf Course, *c.* 1.5 km to the east of the site revealed an area of early Iron Age occupation, and a series of early Roman ditches. They possibly formed an enclosure associated with several pits and postholes. Little else is known about the archaeology of the area in the vicinity of the development site, probably due to its historic use as common land and subsequently as parkland.

The location of the proposed development is on two sites; the Guinness Trust site lies immediately to the south of Waterman's Road and immediately to the west of the Reading Road; the YMCA site lies immediately adjacent to the north-west of the Guinness site, being bounded to the south and east by Waterman's Road. The Guinness Trust site is located at NGR SP 7660 8145 (centred), and the YMCA site at NGR SP 7655 8150 (centred).

### **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; all excavation was undertaken by 360° tracked excavator. Excavations for both foundations and drainage were monitored for the presence of deposits, features and finds.

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**

The similarity of deposits seen across both sites allows for a general description rather than describing areas individually.

The initial topsoil strip exposed the subsoil across the site and this was examined both during and after this process for the presence of features/finds, however none were seen.

Subsequently the excavations for foundations and drainage for the individual plots on both sites were examined for any archaeology which may have been obscured in plan. With the exception of several tree holes seen in the vicinity of the foundations for plots 10, 11 and 12 on the Guinness Trust site nothing was seen.

## **6 Finds**

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

## **7 Environmental results**

Due to the absence of any archaeology, no environmental soil samples were taken.

## **8 Discussion**

No archaeology of any description was seen during the course of the watching brief, with only natural deposits being identified and recorded; nothing was found to contradict the history of the site as historic common land and parkland.

## **References.**

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

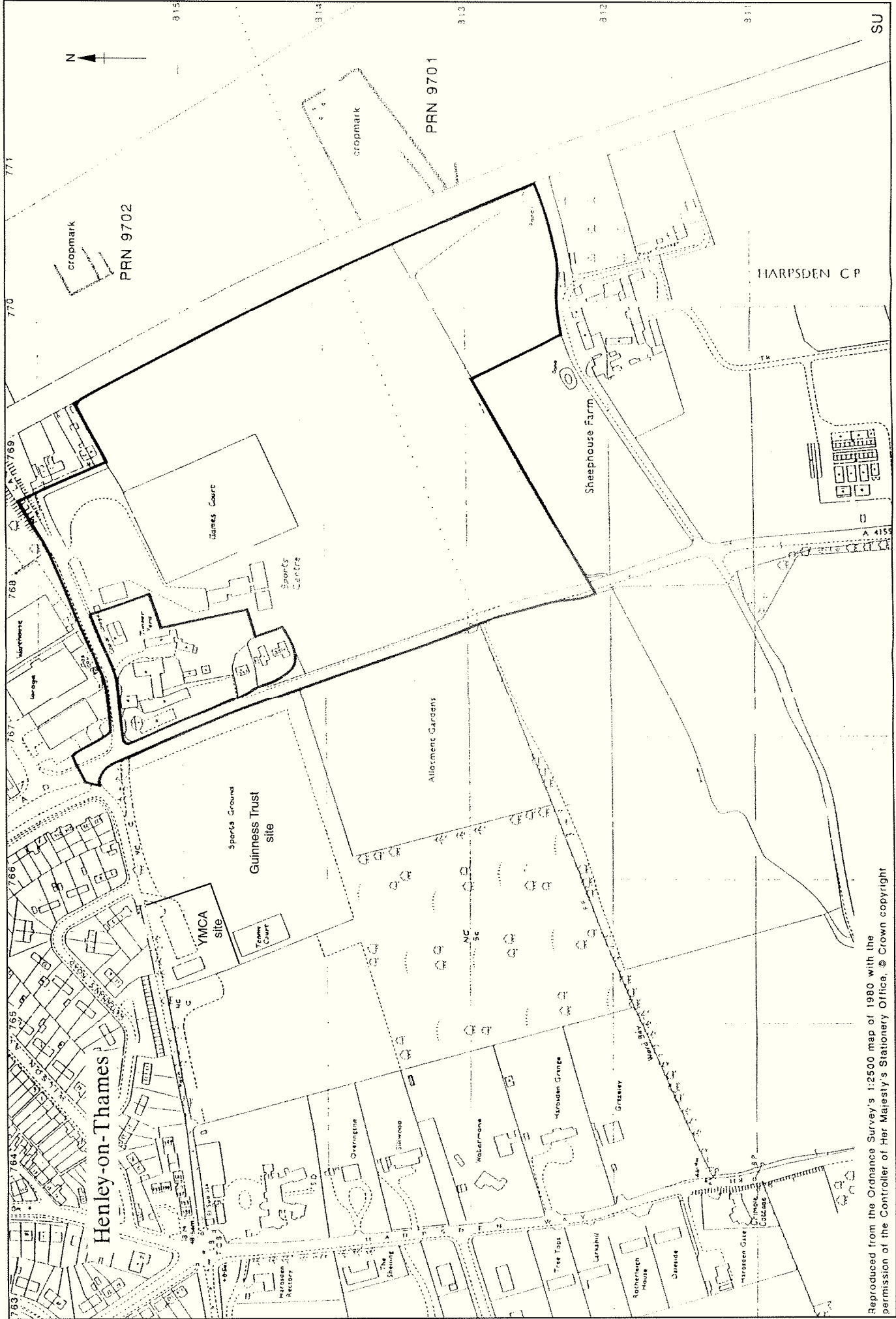


figure 1: site location

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scale 1:2500





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