

OXFORDSHIRE AMBULANCE SERVICE, NEW MANAGEMENT HQ BUILDING AT THE CHURCHILL HOSPITAL, OXFORD

### Introduction

A watching brief was carried out in February 1994 during earthmoving connected with the construction of the new building (planning application PS/SJC 0660/93). The site, at c SP 54530567, lies no more than about 50 m S of the nearest known kiln at the S end of the complex Roman pottery production site partly examined at various times in the 1950s and 1960s and excavated in the 1970s and 1980s in advance of other development within the hospital. The object of the watching brief was to determine whether the pottery production area and an apparently associated system of boundaries extended as far as the present site. No evidence was found to suggest that this had been the case, but Roman deposits in the area may have been truncated by later activity.

### The watching brief

The site was visited on three occasions, during which most of the trenches excavated for the foundations of the new building were observed (the consistent character of the negative evidence found here resulted in a decision not to carry out a further visit to monitor the excavation of drainage trenches). Although the architects' plan indicated that much of the structure would be carried on pads 0.60 m square, the foundations for internal supports were dug as continuous trenches aligned N-S (the long axis of the building was E-W). These trenches were quite closely spaced so it is certain that only very small discrete features would have escaped undetected between them. The trenches were mostly c 0.80 m wide, though some of the internal trenches in the centre and at the W end of the building were only c 0.60 m wide. The depth of the trenches varied considerably as a result of the underlying contour of the ground, which sloped down from N to S. The trenches on the uphill (N) side were only c 0.80-0.90 m deep below the modern ground surface, but to the S their bases were stepped down and along the S side the trench was up to c 1.40 m deep.

All the trench sections showed a consistent profile. The undisturbed natural subsoil consisted of yellow-brown sand with lenses of sandstone within it. This was recorded as layer 3. Above it was a layer (2) of compact grey brown silty sand with occasional lighter flecks. This layer, consistently about 0.25 m thick, contained a few small sherds of Roman pottery and post-medieval pottery and glass, some of these occurring right at the base of the layer. It was characteristically flecked with fragments of coal throughout its depth. The overlying layer (1), varied considerably in depth, from c 0.25-0.45 m, and may have been deeper in places at the W end where there was more modern disturbance. It consisted of dumped and levelled rubbish and building material in a matrix of loamy sand supporting modern topsoil and turf.

The finds, all from layer 2, consisted of three small Roman sherds and material of recent (19th-20th date). The latter was

not retained. The Roman sherds were two white mortarium fragments and a grey coarse ware fragment. All were abraded.

#### Discussion and conclusions

No ancient features or deposits survived in situ. The lowest stratified layer (2) contained material of recent date. It is possible that this material was incorporated by ploughing into an earlier deposit, but this seems unlikely. Any pre-19th century deposits may therefore have been completely truncated, though it is very doubtful that these would have included any features of substance. The Roman sherds incorporated in layer 2 are typical of the products of the kiln site to the N. Such material would have been quite widely distributed around the environs of the site and its occurrence here does not necessarily indicate the existence of Roman features in the immediate vicinity. Dumping of relatively recent date has tended to level up the surface, reducing the natural slope to the S.

Paul Booth

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058

The Churchill Hospital  
(General)

057

Radio Mast

Amulance Service  
Headquarters

feet (um)

LOCATION OF  
PROPOSED BUILDING

056

055

545

SP

W. E. P. L. S.

OXFORD EAST ED  
WEST WARD

546

547

OXFORD AND BUCKINGHAMSHIRE E.U.F.C. CCIST