

Watching brief at 77 Temple Road, Temple Cowley, Oxford.

A watching brief was maintained during construction work on this site in the winter of 1993-4. An evaluation, carried out in September 1993 in advance of the determination of the planning application (NFH/0478/93), had identified a possible stoke hole for a Roman pottery kiln towards the western end of the site (in trench 2). Provision for archaeological monitoring of earthmoving operations during construction was therefore requested as a condition of planning consent.

The archaeological and historical background to the site has been outlined in the report on the evaluation, and is not repeated here.

The watching brief was carried out during December 1993 and January 1994, with the final visit to the site on February 1st. It was not possible to observe all the earthmoving operations, since this would have required very intensive monitoring, but most of the excavation of the main service trench and the stripping of the overlying access road was watched, along with the foundations for the new houses at the eastern end of the site. The foundation trenches of the more westerly houses, close to evaluation trench 2, were the last to be dug out by the contractors and were unfortunately not observed. Nevertheless, on the basis of information from the contractors and of surface examination of the area after the foundation trenches had been excavated, it is not believed that any significant information was lost here.

The site was covered by deposits of recent (ie 19th-20th century) date, including garden soils and dumping layers etc, which ranged from c 0.50 m - 1.00 m deep, the greatest depth being at the east end of the site. The interface between these deposits and the clayey sand subsoil was not always clear, which may mean that some small features could have been undetected. Only two certain features, apart from a few small pits of recent date seen in plan when the roadway was being stripped, were observed.

The two features both occurred in the sides of the main service trench. 305, located in the S face of the trench some 20 m E of the present frontage of Temple Road, was a pit (or possibly the terminal of a N-S aligned ditch) some 1.95 m across and 0.70 m deep. It was filled with brown sandy silt (304) with a few small limestone pieces and occasional charcoal flecks. This deposit contained four small medieval sherds with a likely date range of late 12th-14th century. Some 41 m further E of 305 was 306, located in the N face of the trench. This was apparently a large posthole, some 0.80 m across and 0.45 m deep, with a post pipe (309) up to c 0.25 m across. The main fill (308) was a grey brown loamy sand containing three medieval sherds for which a late 12th-14th century date range, as with feature 305, is likely.

No other artefacts were recovered from the site. The recent deposits (see above) contained small quantities of 19th and 20th century material (none of which was retained) but no earlier pottery was seen, despite a careful check of topsoil dumps etc.

Conclusion

Despite the evidence of evaluation trench 2 a very low density of archaeological features, entirely located in the western half of the site, is implied by this work. The detected features were of medieval date. No Roman features or objects were recovered. The absence even of stray finds of Roman pottery is noteworthy. The features located in evaluation trench 2 may therefore have been relatively isolated. If they were related to Roman pottery production they could perhaps be seen as a continuation of the area of such activity identified to the W in St Luke's Road. The occurrence of scattered features, which seems to have been paralleled there, may also have been characteristic of other pottery production sites in the area, such as Rose Hill and the Churchill Hospital.

Paul Booth

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