New ATC Tower
RNAS Yeovilton
Yeovilton

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Oxford Archaeology

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New ATC Tower
RNAS Yeovilton

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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Fig. 1 Location of site

SUMMARY

In Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief on the excavation of six geotechnical investigation pits at RNAS Yeovilton in advance of construction of a new air traffic control tower. No archaeological finds or features were observed.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work (Fig. 1)

1.1.1 On 17th February 2004, Oxford Archaeology undertook an archaeological watching brief on a programme of geotechnical investigations being carried out by Faber Maunsel geotechnical engineers at RNAS Yeovilton, Somerset (ST 5535 2315). These works were carried out on the site of a proposed new air traffic control tower, and comprised the excavation of a total of six test pits. The archaeological watching brief was commissioned by the developers, Debut Services (SW) Ltd, at the request of Martin Brown, archaeological advisor to the Ministry of Defence, due to the site lying in an area of high archaeological potential.

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The site is situated in the valley of the River Yeo, *c*. 0.5 km north of the confluence of the river with Hornsey Brook. The underlying geology is oolitic limestone overlain by Lias clay. The test pits were excavated into a grassed area surrounding existing buildings, lying at *c.* 15 m OD.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 This part of Somerset has attracted settlement since at least the Neolithic , as demonstrated by the discovery near Westhay of the "Sweet Track", a timber walkway dating from c. 4000 BC. However, it is likely that the clay valleys were not cleared of woodland until a later date.

1.3.2 During the Iron Age the surrounding area was dominated by the hillfort at South Cadbury, 8 km to the east of the site (Cunliffe 1991, 353). This site was densely occupied, and also contained one of the few known shrines dating to this period (ibid, 512).

1.3.3 The site lies only 3 km from the Roman town at Ilchester. The town was located on the Fosse Way, the main Roman road from Exeter to Lincoln, and during the later part of the Roman period may have been the main centre for the local tribal group (Frere 1999, 236). As a result of the importance of the town as an administrative and market centre other settlements cluster around it, such as the villas at Knole Knapp and Ilchester Mead and the village at Catsgore. The A303, which passes to the north of the site, is believed to follow the line of a Roman road leading eastward from the town.

1.3.4 During the post-Roman period South Cadbury was re-fortified and again became a major focus of activity (Alcock, 2001). Ilchester remained important as a crossing point on the River Yeo. It was the site of a mint between 959 and 1248, and was a Royal Borough during the Norman era. The earliest reference to Yeovilton itself appears in 1068 in the Domesday book. The site lies to the east of the village, in an area which was probably the village's fields throughout the middle ages, up until the construction of the modern air station.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 To identify and record the presence/absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.

2.1.2 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The work being monitored comprised the excavation of a total of six test pits. The test pits were excavated under archaeological supervision by a mechanical excavator (JCB) using a toothed bucket. The test pits were 0.6 m wide and between 1.3 m and 1.7 m long, with depths varying from 2.3 m to 3.8 m. The deposits revealed in each test pit were recorded on *pro forma* sheets, each layer being allocated a unique context number. A photographic record was also made of the sequence exposed in the face of each pit. in addition, the excavated spoil was scanned visually for finds. These recording procedures were carried out in accordance with the practices detailed in the Oxford Archaeology fieldwork manual (OAU 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

Test Pits 1, 2 and 3

3.1.1 Bluish grey Lias clay was encountered in these test pits at a depth of between 0.6 m and 0.8 m below the current ground level. This was overlain by a reddish brown clayey subsoil between 0.3 m and 0.5 m thick, sealed by a layer of greyish brown clay loam topsoil 0.3 m thick. In Trench 1 this was further overlain by a deposit of yellowish brown sandy clay 0.2 m thick, which may be material redeposited in the course of levelleing the area..

Test pits 4, 5A and 5B

3.1.2 In test pits 4, 5A and 5B the Lias clay was encountered at between 0.5 m and 0.7 m below ground level, and was overlain by a yellowish sandy layer 0.2 - 0.4 m thick with a significant flint gravel component. This latter layer may be of alluvial origin and was sealed by the modern topsoil.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1.1 No archaeological finds or features were observed in the watching brief. The subsoil in test pits 4, 5A and 5B appeared to be of alluvial origin, while that in test pits 1, 2 and 3 was of a more mixed nature, possibly indicating that this part of the site had been ploughed to a greater depth. Some evidence for levelling was observed in Test Pit 1, but this did not impact on any potential archaeological horizons. The levelling is likely to be associated with the construction of the air station.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

CONTEXT NO..	TEST PIT.	TYPE	DEPTH (M)	COMMENTS
1	5A	Layer	0 - 0.3	Topsoil
2	5A		0.3 - 0.5	Subsoil/alluvium
3	5A		0.5+	Lias clay
4	5B		0 - 0.25	Topsoil
5	5B		0.25 - 0.5	Subsoil/alluvium
6	5B		0.5+	Lias clay
7	4		0 - 0.3	Topsoil
8	4		0.3 - 0.7	Subsoil/alluvium
9	4		0.7+	Lias clay
10	2		0 - 0.3	Topsoil
11	2		0.3 - 0.6	Subsoil
12	2		0.6+	Lias clay
13	3		0 - 0.3	Topsoil
14	3		0.3 - 0.8	Subsoil
15	3		0.8+	Lias clay
16	1		0 - 0.2	Levelling?
17	1		0.2 - 0.5	Buried topsoil
18	1		0.5 - 8	Subsoil
19	1		0.8+	Lias clay

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Alcock, L 2001 *Arthur's Britain: history and archaeology, AD367-634*. Penguin, London.
Cunliffe, B 1991 *Iron Age Communities in Britain*. 3rd Edition. Routledge, London.
Frere, S 1999 *Britannia: a history of Roman Britain*. Routledge, London.
OAU 1992 *Fieldwork Manual* (Ed. D Wilkinson)

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: RNAS Yeovilton
Site code: TTNCM 11/2004
Grid reference: ST 5535 2315
Type of watching brief: Six machine excavated test pits
Date and duration of project: 17/2/2004
Area of site:
Summary of results: No archaeological finds or features were observed
Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Somerset County Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number: TTNCM 11/2004

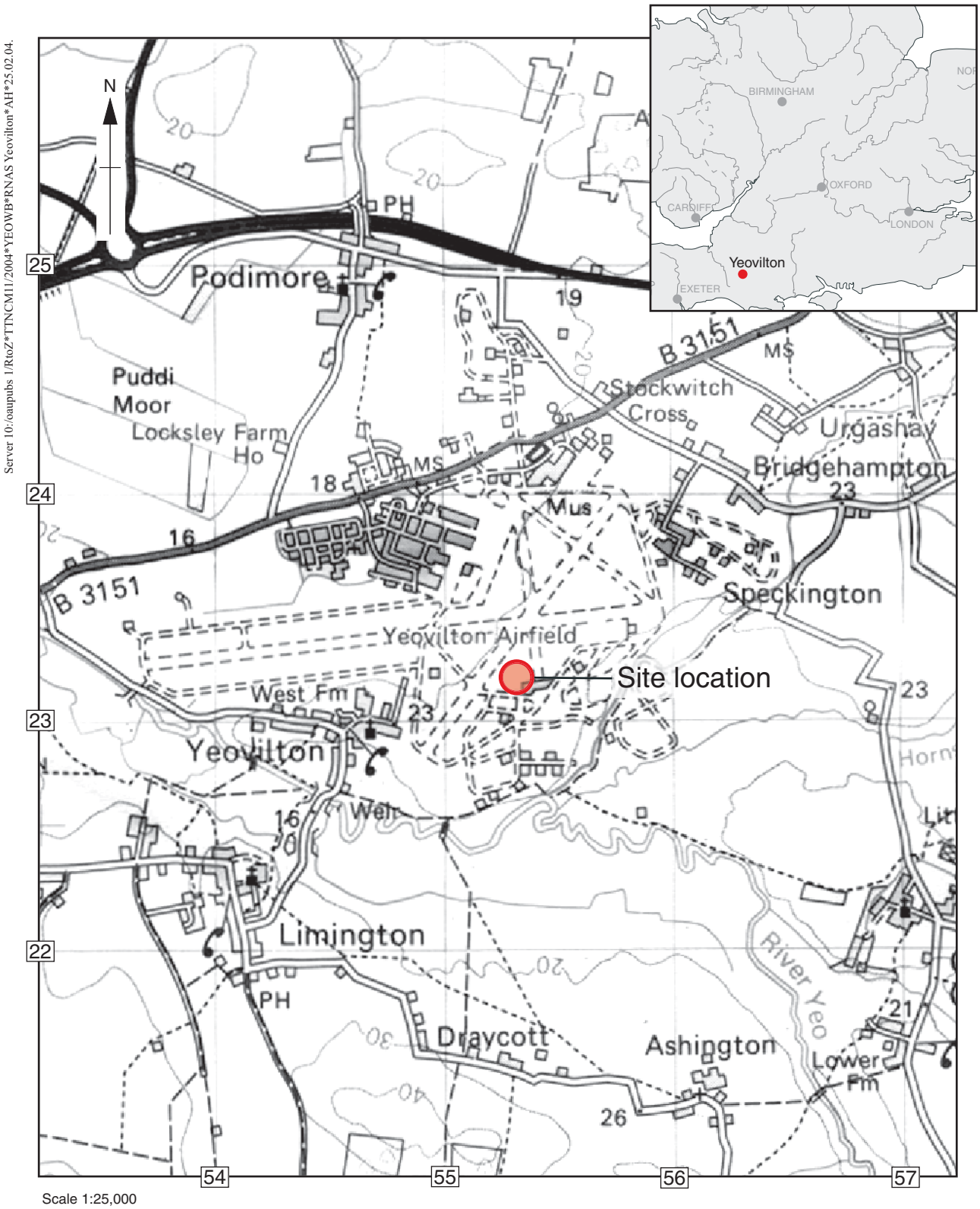

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Figure 1: Site location