

The Royal Pavilion, Aldershot, Hampshire

An Archaeological Evaluation
for CSC Computer Services Limited

by Steve Ford
Thames Valley Archaeological Services

Site Code RPA99/86

December 1999

Summary

Site name: The Royal Pavilion, Aldershot, Hampshire

Grid reference: SU 85050 50650

Site activity: Evaluation

Date and Duration of Project: 9th–13th December 1999

Area of Site: 3 hectares

Summary of Results: Twelve evaluation trenches and five hand-dug test pits were excavated. No archaeological deposits were encountered. A single find of prehistoric struck flint was recovered.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is at present held by Thames Valley Archaeological Services, 47–49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading, RG1 5NR, and will be deposited with Hampshire Museum Service in due course.

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The Royal Pavilion, Aldershot, Hampshire An Archaeological Evaluation

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Report 99/86

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at the former Royal Pavilion, Farnborough Road, Aldershot, Hampshire (SU 85050 50650) (Fig 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Paul Chadwick of CgMs Consulting, 7th Floor, Newspaper House, 8-16 Great New Street, London, EC4A 3BN, on behalf of CSC Computer Services Limited.

Planning permission (99/00035/OUT) has been granted by Rushmoor Borough Council for a comprehensive redevelopment of the site for a head quarters office complex with associated car parking, subject to a condition which requires the implementation of a programme of archaeological work. This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Policy and Planning Guidance Note, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990) and the Rushmoor Borough policies on archaeology.

The work was carried out to a written scheme of investigation prepared by Paul Chadwick of CgMs Consulting and approved by Ian Wykes of Hampshire County Council, who advises Rushmoor Borough Council on archaeological matters. The aim of the evaluation was to provide more detailed information so that an appropriate strategy could be drawn up to mitigate the effects of the development on any archaeology present. The fieldwork was supervised by Steve Ford, assisted by Kate Taylor and Graham Hull, and was undertaken between the 9th and 13th December 1999. The site code is RPA99/86.

Location, Topography and Geology

The site is located on the western side of Aldershot on the margins of an area of heathland (Fig 1). The whole site occupies an area of c. 20 hectares but the evaluation was restricted to an undisturbed area of c. 3 hectares to be occupied by carparking. The site lies at a height of between 110m and 115m above Ordnance Datum. According to the British Geological Survey the underlying geology of the site is Bagshot Beds (BGS 1976).

Archaeological Background

The written scheme of investigation prepared by Paul Chadwick of CgMs noted that the Hampshire Sites and Monuments Record contains entries relating to prehistoric flintwork in the area. To the south-west of the proposal area is a Mesolithic occupation site with a large quantity of struck flints typical of this period comprising microliths, tranchet axes blades, and other, less chronologically diagnostic, cores and flakes. Close by this location was a second scatter of struck flint including pieces of earlier Neolithic date (leaf-shaped arrowheads).

The tertiary geological outcrops of the London basin including the heathland areas occupied by the proposal site are not noted for their high density of archaeological sites but there is a persistent occurrence of earlier prehistoric remains (Ford 1987). As a contrast, adjacent areas of the greensand outcrops in east Hampshire and west Surrey are particularly noteworthy for the presence of very large and dense Mesolithic sites (Rankine 1954). It has been thought that woodland clearance of these heathland areas for agricultural use in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages led to a breakdown of the fragile ecological balance which in turn led to the acidification and agricultural impoverishment of these areas (Dimbleby 1985).

Objectives and Methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the area of development. This was to be accomplished by excavating ten trenches 20m long and 1.8m wide. In the event, twelve trenches were dug 7-32m long and 1.5m wide as a response to logistical considerations on site, such as the requirement to avoid trees which were to be retained. A contingency to excavate an additional 75sq m of trench was included but not used.

The trenches were excavated using a JCB fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. This was employed under direct and continuous archaeological supervision to remove topsoil until the correct archaeological levels were reached. All possible archaeological features were hand cleaned and investigated, and all spoilheaps were monitored for finds. A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1. Five hand-dug test pits were also dug to assess the artefact content of the topsoil.

Results

The trenches

The trenches varied in length from 7m to 32m and were located as shown on Figure 2. Description of the trenches can be subdivided into two; those to the west of the site (1–5) and those to the east (6–12). The trenches to the west were located on sloping ground and showed various amounts of disturbance or build up of soil possibly due to landscaping. This is exemplified by Trench 5. The top of the natural geology at the northern end of the trench was only c. 0.1m down beneath leaf litter and was heavily disturbed by roots. To the south a large pit c. 2m across had been dug in recent times and further south dumping and burning had taken place. The southern-most end of the trench was mostly occupied by substantial shrub roots. The other trenches in this area showed less disturbance with turf, leaf litter and topsoil overlying pale brown sand.

The trenches to the east produced a relatively similar profile to each other comprising a thin upper layer of leaf litter/moss overlying clean, pale brown sand sometimes with cherty inclusions. Various black sand patches superficially similar to cut archaeological deposits were revealed but investigation showed that these were natural areas of iron and manganese pan typical of acidic heathland contexts. Some larger disturbed patches were tree holes and various linear striations were probably a product of forestry management or perhaps ploughing in the early 19th century.

No archaeology was observed within any of the trenches and only a single find was retrieved from the spoilheaps.

The test pits

Five test pits were dug by hand in the positions shown on Figure 2. The test pits were 0.5m square and the spoil was sieved through a 5mm mesh. The test pits were typically 0.6–0.12m deep and below turf/moss revealed clean, pale brown sand. Two test pits (TP1 and TP4) were deeper (0.35m). Whereas TP4 revealed turf and a topsoil overlying sand, the fill of TP1 included brick fragments and the natural bedrock was not reached. This appears to indicate that the deposit here is made ground. No finds of archaeological significance were revealed in any of the test pits.

The Finds

A single struck flint, a spall, (a piece less than 20 x 20mm) was recovered from evaluation Trench 1. This piece is chronologically undiagnostic and can only be dated to the general Mesolithic–Bronze Age period. This piece came from a trench which had been disturbed relatively more than other trenches and it is not certain that this piece was not imported to this location from somewhere else on the site or beyond. A few small pieces of burnt flint (not retained) were observed on the spoil of Trench 10.

Conclusion

None of the evaluation trenches located any deposits of archaeological origin. Several of the trenches, especially those to the west (Trenches 1–5), were subject to more modern disturbance than elsewhere with evidence of dumping (landscaping?), burning and hole digging. Only one trench revealed an archaeological find, an undiagnostic struck flint, and this was recovered from a trench which was relatively heavily disturbed. The test pitting strategy was not successful in revealing artefacts within the topsoil. Most of the test pits were shallow and the deepest one (TP1) may have been located in an area of landscaping. On the evidence gained from this work it is concluded that the site has no archaeological potential.

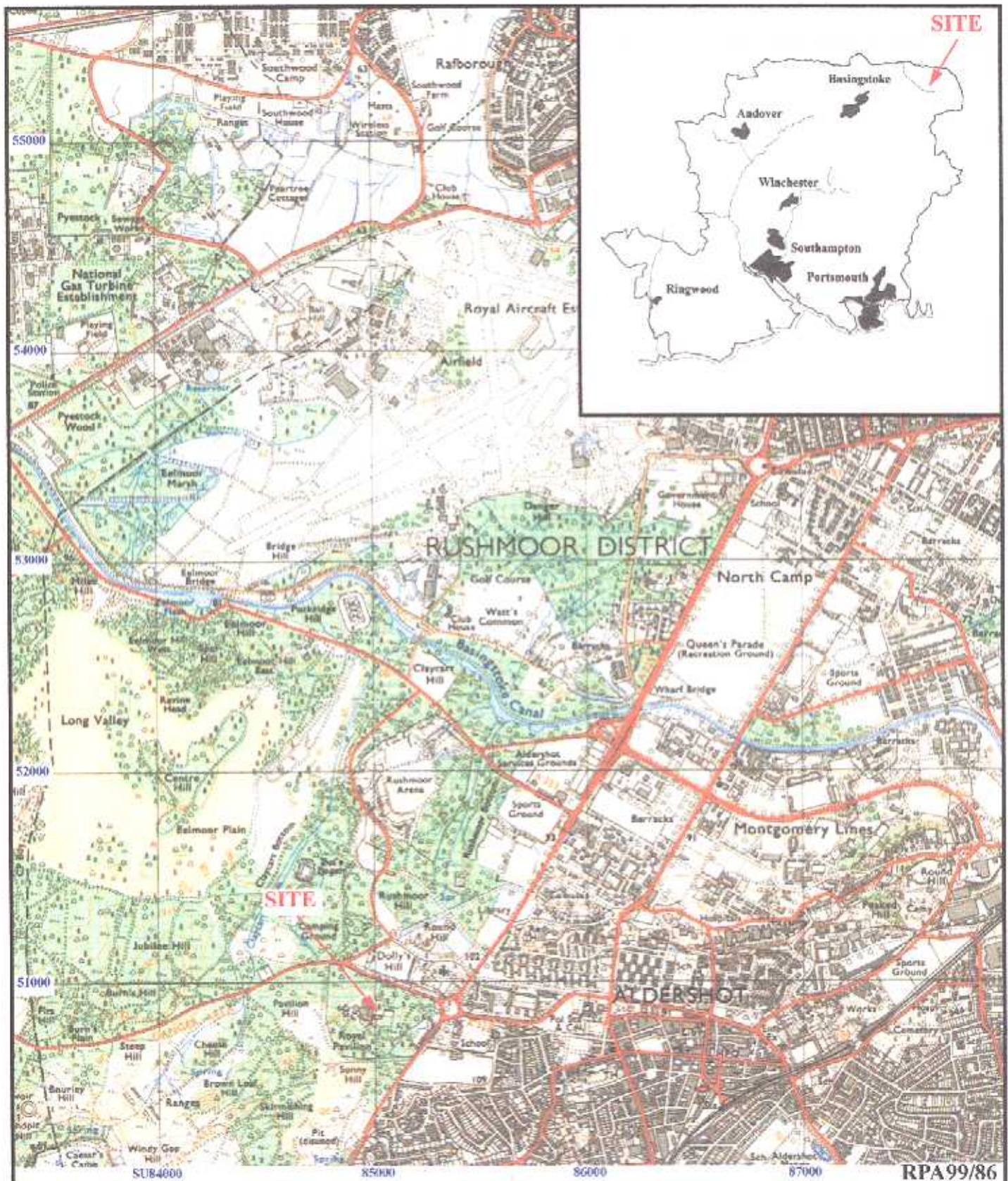
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Appendix 1: Trench details

0 m at south or west end

<i>Trench no</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	14.1	0.3	
2	21.3	0.4	Much root disturbance, Some modern disturbance
3	32.0	0.3	Much modern disturbance at 19–23m and 29–32m
4	23.6	0.45	Modern disturbance at 5–8m and 18–21m
5	25.0	0.1 (N) 0.6 (S)	Modern disturbance at 1–2m, 9–13m and 18–20m. Much root disturbance at southern end
6	21.2	0.35 (NW) 0.55 (SE)	
7	27.0	0.40	Much root disturbance
8	13.6	0.20	
9	7.0	0.40	
10	20.0	0.25(E)	Test pit, west end, to 0.6m grey sand above orange sand and gravel
11	9.0	0.15	
12	16.1	0.35	



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Figure 1. Location of site within Aldershot and Hampshire.

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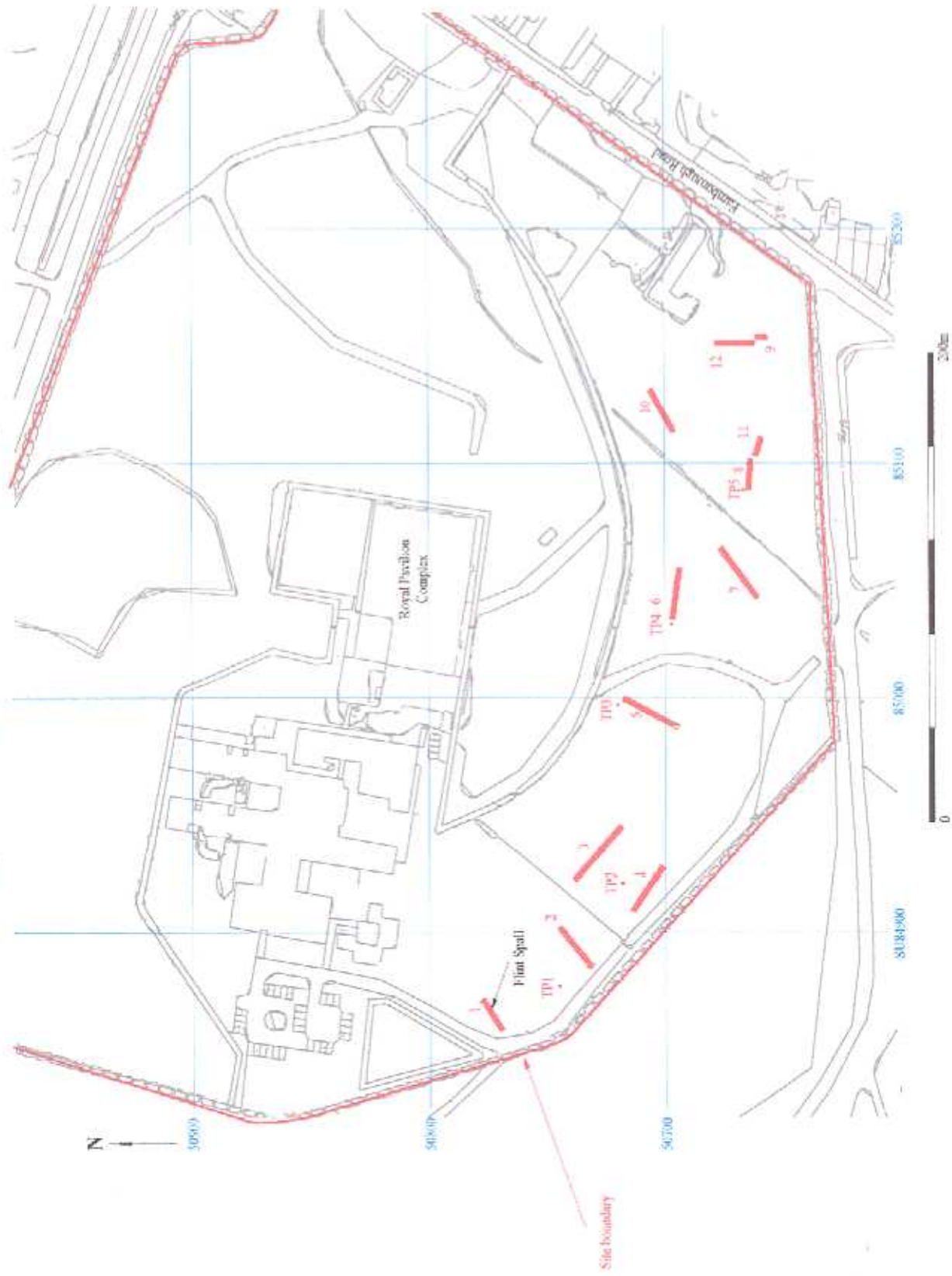


Figure 2. Location of site showing evaluation trenches, test-pits and flint find.



Plate 1. Trench 7 looking north, scales: 2m.



Plate 2. Test-pit 2 looking north east, scales: 0.10m and 0.50m.