

Majors Farm Road, Colnbrook, Berkshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For St James Group Ltd

by Sean Wallis and Pamela Jenkins

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code MFR 02/59

October 2003

Summary

Site name: Majors Farm Road, Colnbrook, Berkshire

Grid reference: TQ 0126 7775

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 22nd July-16th September 2003

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Sarah Coles

Site code: MFR 02/59

Area of site: 0.9ha

Summary of results: No finds were recovered and no archaeology was observed.

Monuments identified: None

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

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Report 02/59b

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at Majors Farm Road, Colnbrook, Berkshire (TQ 0126 7775) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Andrew Sinclair of St James Group Ltd, Wellington House, 209–217 High Street, Hampton Hill, Middlesex, TW12 1NP.

A planning consent (P/00586/003) has been granted by Slough Borough Council to develop the site for residential apartments and associated landscaping and car parking. This is subject to a condition relating to archaeology, which requires a watching brief to be carried out during groundworks.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the Borough's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr K. Beachus, Senior Archaeologist, Babtie (archaeological advisers to Slough Borough Council). The fieldwork was undertaken by Sarah Coles, Clare Challis, Pamela Jenkins and Sean Wallis between 22nd July and 16th September 2003 and the site code is MFR 02/59.

The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Reading Museum in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on a triangular parcel of land to the north of the Queen Mother reservoir and to the south of Majors Farm Road, Colnbrook, Berkshire (TQ 0126 7775). The underlying geology is floodplain gravel and Taplow gravel (BGS 1981), which was observed. The site lies at a height of between 20m and 25m AOD.

Archaeological background

The potential of the site was considered in detail in a desktop study carried out by Thames Valley Archaeological Services (Hardy 2002). In summary, this highlighted that the Thames Valley is rich in archaeology from all periods. Many sites have been recorded from the air and a number of cropmarks have been identified in the vicinity of the site but have not been investigated (Gates 1975). No deposits were recorded for the site itself or immediately adjacent areas. Previous use of the site may have diminished its archaeological

potential, which has also been affected by recent major construction work both to the north (M4 motorway) and south (Queen Mother Reservoir) of the site.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the new construction work. This was to involve the examination of areas stripped of topsoil/overburden, and the excavation of trenches for ground beams and services. Groundworks, however, were to be strictly limited in order to minimize their impact upon the adjacent reservoir rampart. As a result, the laying of groundbeams did not involve excavation and thus did not need to be observed.

Results

The laying of a sewer pipe was observed. The partial removal of topsoil was undertaken within the area where the sewer pipe was to be laid (Fig. 2). A width of 20m and a maximum depth of 0.15m of topsoil was removed along the line of the sewer and no archaeology was observed during this action. Excavation of the sewer trench, which was 100m x 1m and 4m deep (Fig. 2) was carried out in consecutive 5m lengths. Shoring of each 5m length took place at a depth of between 1m and 1.80m. Although topsoil had already been removed within this area, some areas were subsequently made up by a further 0.40m.

The sewer trench in the eastern half of the area revealed either 1.80m of fine yellow-orange sand natural with medium sized sub rounded and sub-angular gravel or 0.50m yellow-orange clayey silt overlying natural gravels. Trenches within the western and centre of the site showed 0.30m of made ground onto 1.20m of sandy clay onto natural gravels.

A test pit 5m x 1m and 2.40m deep was excavated (Fig. 2) revealing 0.15m of mid brown grey sandy silt topsoil above 0.40m of mid orange-brown sandy silt with a moderate amount of small-medium sub rounded and sub angular gravel. This overlay 0.65m of mid brownish grey clayey silt. These two latter layers could represent either buried topsoil or possibly made ground. Below these layers natural gravel and mid orange-yellow sand were seen and this was excavated to a depth of 1.20m. No archaeology was observed.

A drain service trench was excavated in the north-west of the site (Fig. 2). This was excavated for 80m was 0.70m wide and 1.2m deep with a manhole 3m x 4m and approximately 2.70m deep excavated at its far western end. The stratigraphy of the manhole and 25m of pipe trench excavated in the far north-western corner, revealed 0.25m orange-brown sand above 0.20m mid brown-grey sandy silt overlying 0.65m mid greyish brown clayey

sand with occasional stones and gravel. Modern tile was observed within this layer, suggesting that these deposits relate to the landscaping of the site after construction of the reservoir. Below these layers revealed in the manhole was 0.80m of mid brownish grey clay overlying 0.80m natural sand and gravel. The remaining lengths of the drain trench showed 0.20m of topsoil onto a buried soil 0.30m deep onto mid grey brown sandy clay 0.40m deep onto a mid brown grey clay over 0.20m deep. No archaeology was observed within the drain trench.

Finds

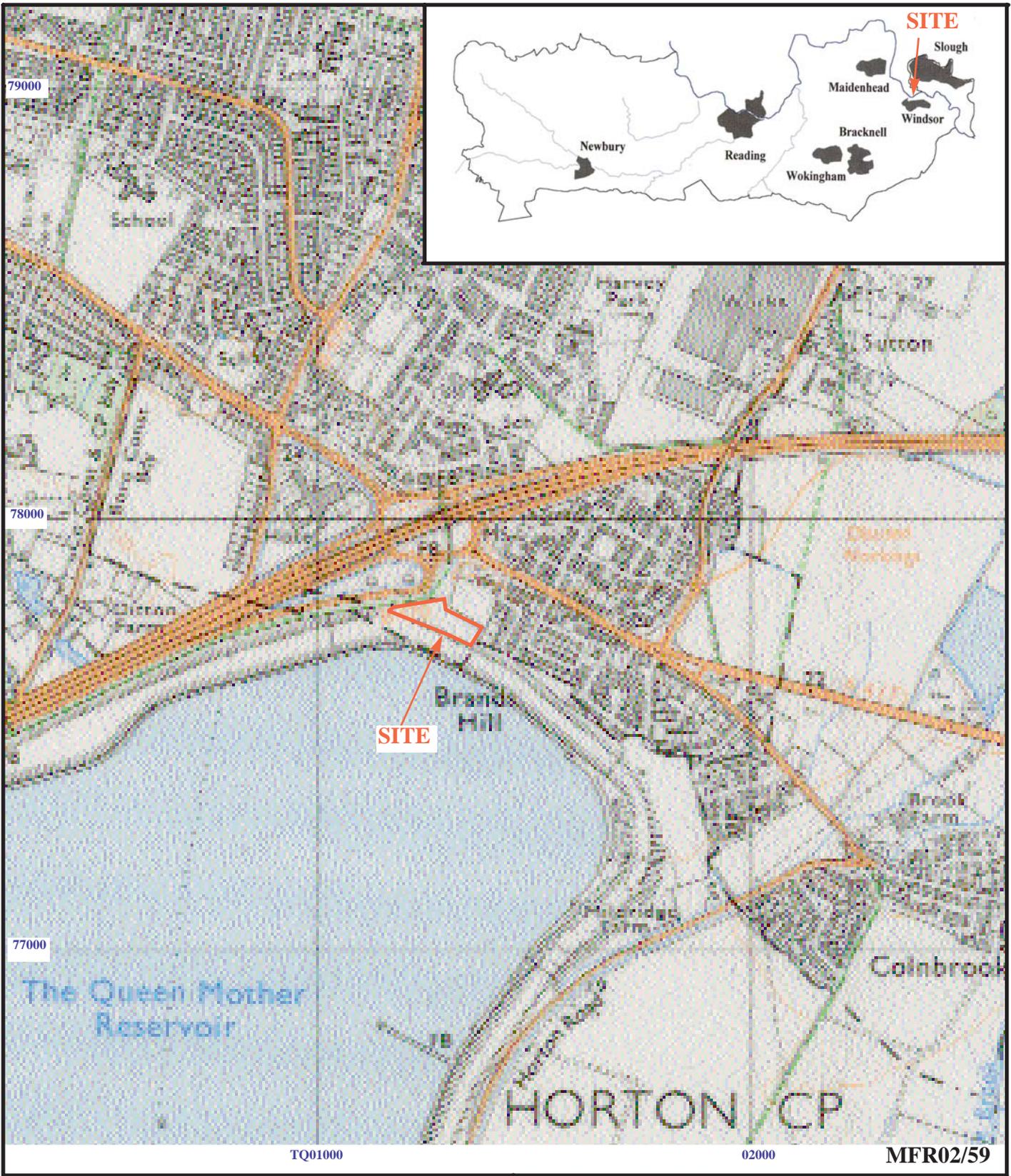
Modern tile was noted but not retained.

Conclusion

No archaeology was observed during the watching brief. As indicated in the desktop study, modern activity in this area makes it difficult to establish the original ground level of the site and the varying stratigraphy revealed by the groundworks indicates that extensive ground disturbance has probably taken place on this site.

References

- BGS, 1981, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50000, Sheet 269, Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth
- Gates, T, 1975, *The Middle Thames Valley. An archaeological survey of the river gravels*, Berkshire Archaeological Committee, Publication number 1
- Hardy, L, 2002, Land north of Queen Mother Reservoir, Majors Farm Road, Colnbrook, an archaeological desk-based assessment, Thames Valley Archaeological Services report 02/59, Reading
- PPG 16, 1990, *Archaeology and Planning*, Dept of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance 16, HMSO

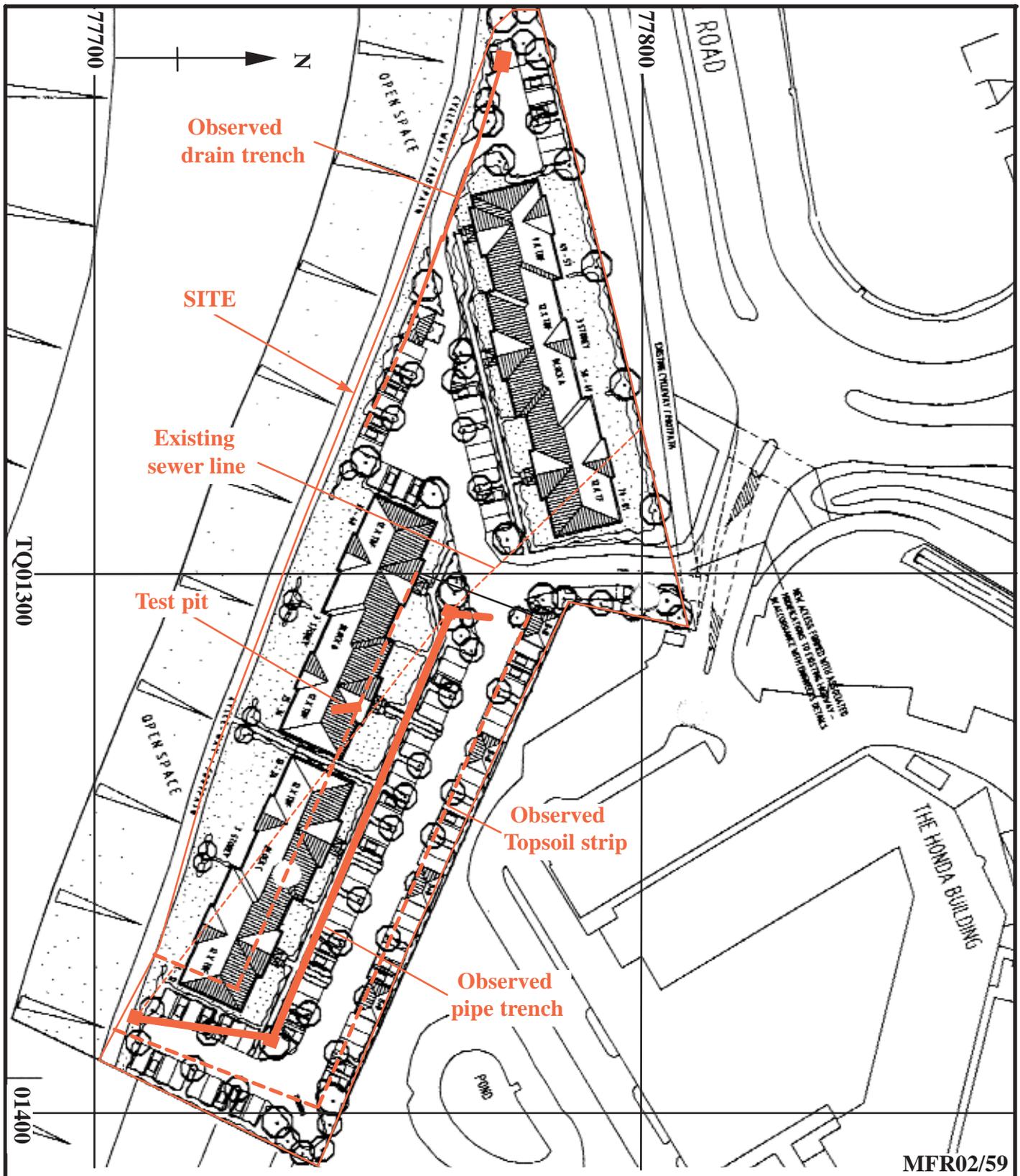


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Figure 1. Location of site within Colnbrook and Berkshire.

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Figure 2. Location of areas observed during watching brief.