

**Former Church of Our Lady, Richmond Road,
Caversham, Reading, Berkshire**

**An Archaeological Watching Brief
For Highfield Developments**

by Andy Taylor and Jo Pine
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code RRC 03/81

October 2003

Summary

Site name: Former Church of Our Lady, Richmond Road, Caversham, Reading, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 7066 7605

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 2nd-26th September 2003

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Rob Court

Site code: RRC 03/81

Area of site: 510 sq m

Summary of results: An undated pit and 14 worked flints were found. Ten of the latter are rolled and stained and are of Palaeolithic date with the remainder of Neolithic or Bronze Age date. An undated pit was also recorded.

Monuments identified: Pit

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, 47–49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading RG 1 5NR and will be deposited at Reading Museum in due course.

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Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford ✓ 07.10.03
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Report 03/81

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at the site of the former Church of Our Lady of Caversham, Richmond Road, Caversham, Reading, Berkshire. (SU 7066 7605) (Fig.1). The work was commissioned by Ms Frances Candlin, Highfield Developments, 17 Peppard Road, Sonning Common, Reading, RG4 9SS.

A planning consent (02/00763/FUL) has been granted by Reading Borough Council to demolish the deconsecrated church and erect a block of apartments with car parking and landscaping. As a result of the possibility of damage to or destruction of archaeological deposits on the site, a condition of the planning consent required that an archaeological watching brief should take place 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 Kev Beachus, Senior Archaeologist with Babbie, archaeological advisers to Reading Borough Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by Rob Court, Steve Hammond, Andy Munding and Jo Pine between 2nd and 26th of September 2003, and the site code is RRC 03/81.

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

Location, topography and geology

The site is located to the north of both the river Thames and Reading town centre. It is situated on the north side of Richmond Road, Caversham at its junction with Kidmore Road (Fig. 2). The site lies at a height of approximately 70m above Ordnance Datum overlooking the present course of the River Thames. The underlying geology is Plateau gravel (Boyn Hill Terrace) (BGS 1971).

Archaeological background

The site lies within an area of known archaeological potential, from which numerous flint tools of lower Palaeolithic date have been recovered from the remnants of old flood plains (now gravel terraces) of the River

Thames (Wymer 1968; 1999, 50, 59 and Maps 3 and 6). Several of those find spots are in the near vicinity of the site, as follows.

Just to the north lies Kidmore Road gravel pit (SU 706 761) which was worked between the World Wars and from which numerous (over 200?) hand axes were recovered. Also to the north of the site is 'Smiths Gravel Pit', 182 Kidmore Road (SU 706 762) where 5 hand axes and 6 primary flakes were recovered. At the western end of Richmond Avenue (SU 705 758) 4 primary flakes were recovered. Also to the west of the site hand axes were recovered during groundworks in Conisboro Avenue (SU 704 761). To the south of the site in Highmoor Road (SU 707 754) and Harrogate Road (SU 705 757) numerous hand axes were found during groundworks for drainage in 1931 and 1932. A single hand axe was recovered from St Peter's Avenue (SU 703 757).

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 examination of areas of topsoil stripping, landscaping, ground reduction and the digging of trenches for foundations and services.

Results

Following demolition of the existing church, topsoil stripping and ground reduction occurred. Topsoil and 0.40m of natural gravel were removed prior to foundation trench excavation. This was observed on a continuous basis and spoil that was generated was routinely examined. Fourteen struck flints were recovered from the stripped surface of the natural gravel. A pit (1) was recorded 1.30m in diameter and 1.08m deep truncating the surface of the natural gravel (Figs 3 and 4). It was half sectioned but its sandy silt fill (50) did not contain any finds.

Foundation trenches for the new buildings were also observed. These were between 0.80m and 1.00m wide and at least 1m deep excavated through the exposed natural. No features or finds were recorded from within the gravel. Service trenches were also examined these being 0.85m wide and 0.57m deep. Similarly, no features or finds were recorded from these.

Finds

Struck flint by Steve Ford

A collection of 14 struck flints were recovered from the site. Four of the flints recovered were moderately fresh and unstained. A core and two flakes are of later prehistoric date and are mostly likely to be from the Neolithic

or Bronze Age. The fourth piece is a struck fragment of uncertain origin and may be an accidental product of relatively modern date.

The remaining ten pieces are from the surface of the gravel and are all rolled and stained to some degree. This context therefore would appear to indicate that they are of lower Palaeolithic date. Six of the pieces are flakes of which two retain most of the cortex. They all have some edge damage which is likely to be a product of the harsh depositional environment, but three may represent deliberate retouch.

The remaining four are nodular pieces. One is a core (294g) with the scars of at least three removals present. Two others are frost-shattered nodules (216g and 276g) but with some intensive edge damage likely to represent retouch or perhaps testing of raw material prior to flaking. The final piece is a flattish nodule (88g) with one large removal scar present.

Conclusion

The watching brief has successfully recorded archaeological finds and deposits on this site. A small amount of lower Palaeolithic flintwork has been retrieved from the surface of the gravel which adds yet another find spot to this prolific location within Caversham. Regrettably, as for most of the Palaeolithic material in the Reading, these finds are from secondary contexts having been transported from where they were discarded to a greater or lesser extent, during formation of the gravel terrace.

A small number of struck flints of Neolithic or Bronze Age date were also found. Such material is distributed widely across flint-rich southern England and this is exemplified in the Mapledurham area of South Oxfordshire to the north of the site (Ford 1991; 1998). The small numbers of flints here probably represent casual loss or discard away from an occupation sites.

The discovery of a pit is of some interest, as this may represent the presence of occupation on or close to the site but interpretation is frustrated by the absence of dating evidence.

References

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- Wymer, J, 1968, *The Lower Palaeolithic Archaeology in Britain*, Southampton
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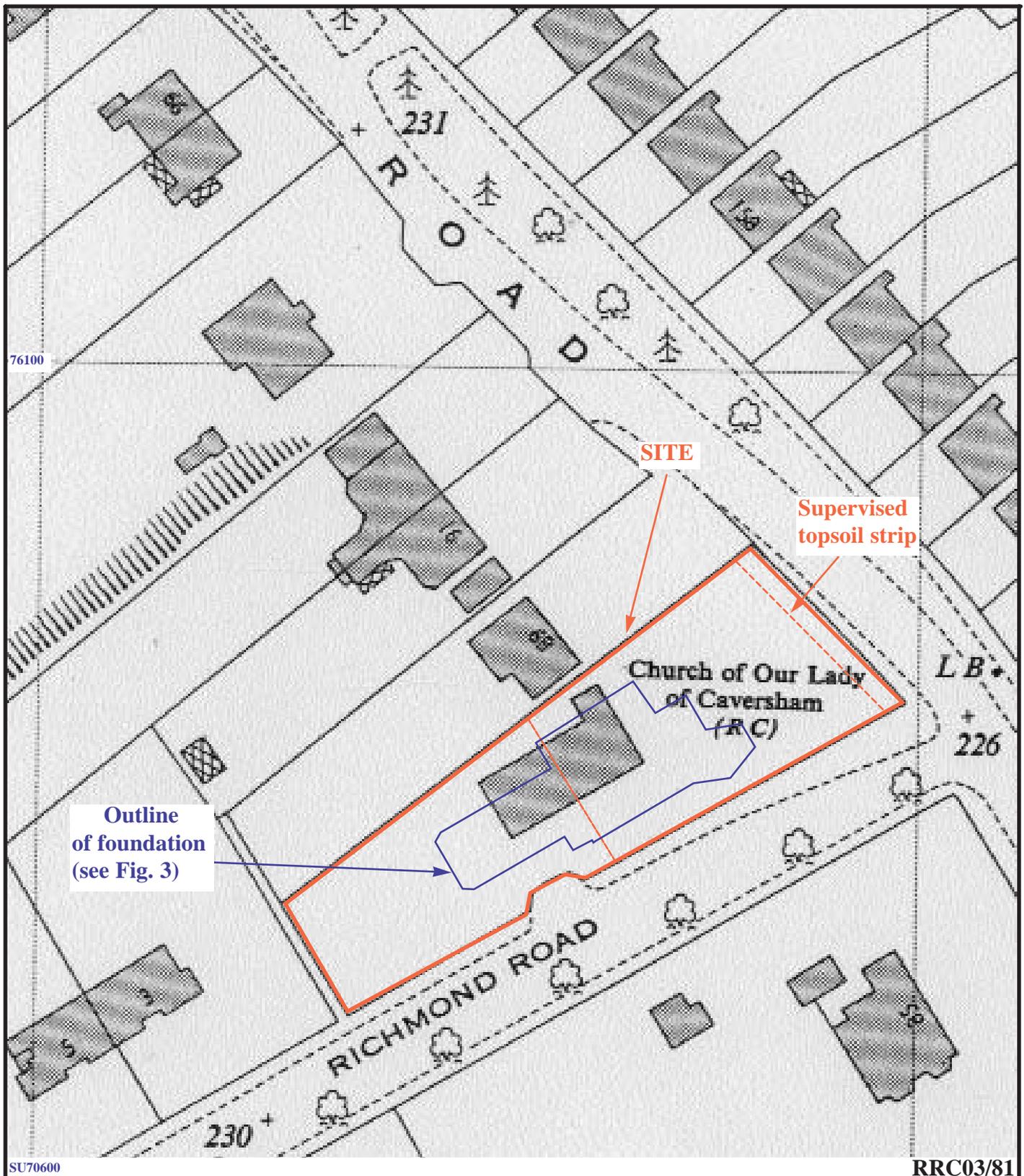


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Figure 1. Location of site within Caversham and Reading.

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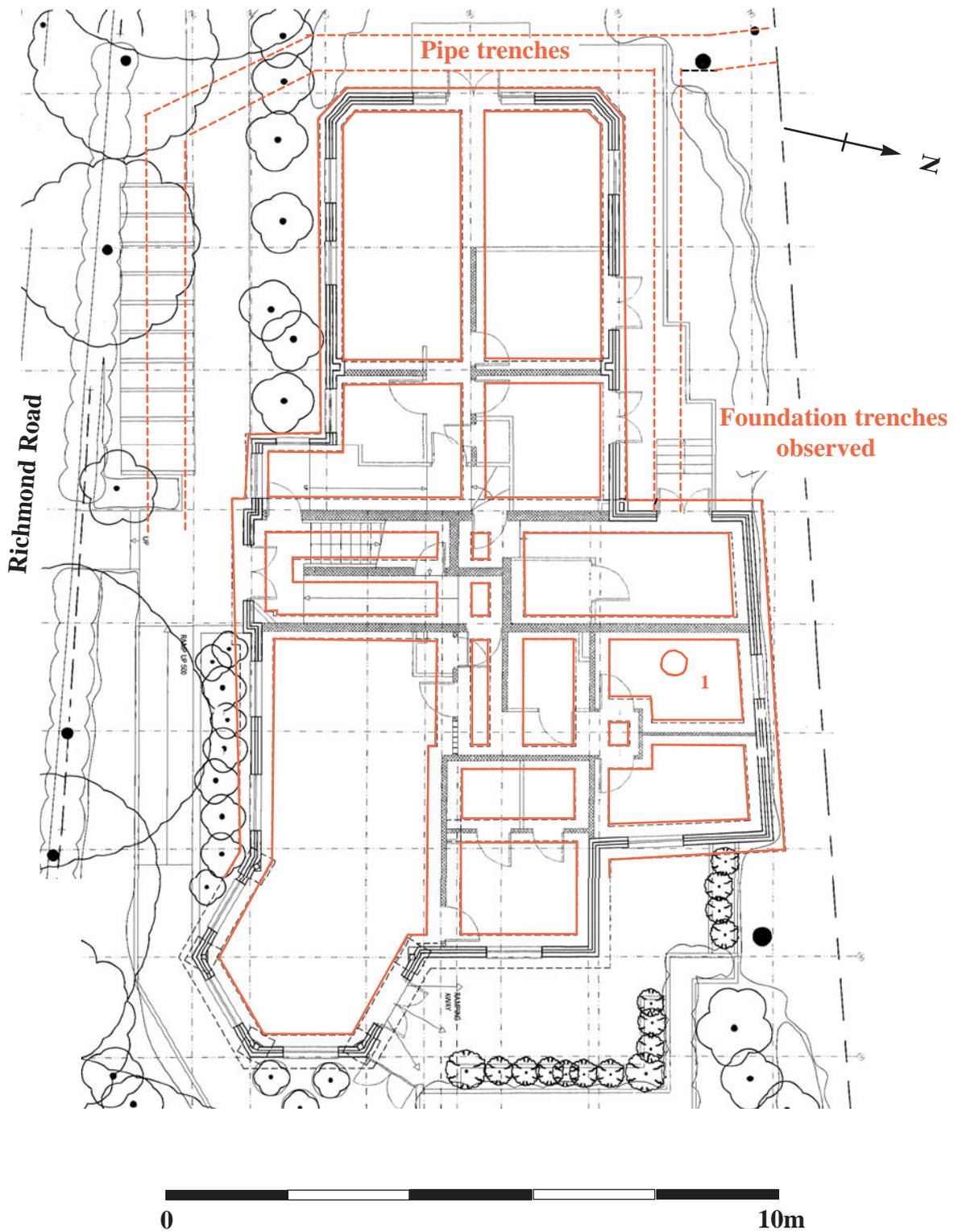


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Figure 2. Location of site on Richmond Road.

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Figure 3. Detail of areas observed and location of Pit 1.

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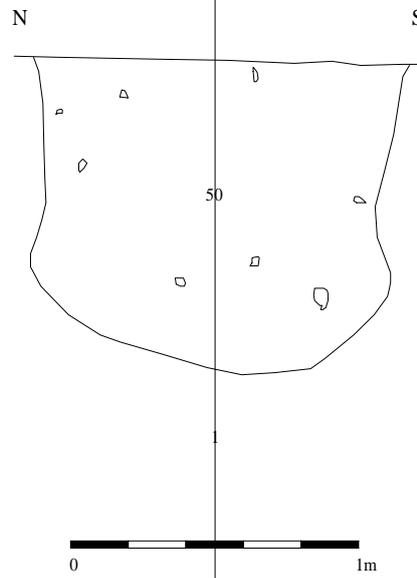


Figure 4. Section of Pit 1.