38-40 Oak Tree Road, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For P J Knott Property Ltd

by Simon Cass
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code: OTT06/74

December 2006
Summary

Site name: 38-40 Oak Tree Road, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 6716 7499

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 6th July – 24th August 2006

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Andrew Taylor

Site code: OTT06/74

Summary of results: No deposits of archaeological interest were revealed.

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

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Preston✓ 11.12.06
Steve Ford✓ 11.12.06
Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at 38-40 Oak Tree Road, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire (SU 6716 7499) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Peter Knott of P J Knott Property Limited, 20 Wakemans, Upper Basildon, Reading, RG8 8JE.

A planning consent (02/00740/FUL) has been granted by Reading Borough Council to construct new housing and associated works following demolition of existing buildings on the site. This consent is subject to a condition (26) 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 Mike Lang Hall, Acting Archaeological Officer with Berkshire Archaeology, advisers to the Borough on matters relating to archaeology. The fieldwork was undertaken by Andrew Taylor, Sean Wallis, Steve Ford and Steve Hammond between 6th July and 24th August 2006 and the site code is OTT06/74.

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

Location, topography and geology

The site is located in Tilehurst, on the side of the valley of the river Thames which flows by to the north. It is bounded by Overdown Road to the north and Oak Tree Road to the south with Oak Tree Copse immediately to the west (Fig. 2). The development entailed the demolition of three existing buildings and construction of eight new dwellings. The underlying geology is mapped as being on a band of alluvium surrounded by Upper Chalk (BGS 1946). The foundations revealed mostly gravels with patches of chalky deposits. The site slopes from 52m above Ordnance Datum in south and west to 50m in the north-east.
Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site is derived from its location within the Thames valley; regarded as an area relatively rich in archaeological deposits and findspots with many sites recorded from the air (Gates 1975) and dredged from the river (Briggs et. al. 1986). Of particular relevance to this site is the presence of deposits containing Palaeolithic flintwork with the higher gravel terraces of former courses of the river Thames, often providing prolific numbers of finds in the Reading area (Wymer 1999, map 3). The Tilehurst plateau itself has several such findspots representing some of the earliest human occupation in Britain. This site, however, is on sloping land that has been eroded and redeposited in later times and thus is unlikely to provide in-situ Palaeolithic material. Other finds in the general area suggest the possible presence of later prehistoric deposits on 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 examination of areas of topsoil stripping, ground reduction and the digging of trenches for foundations and services for structures as necessary.

Results

Foundations for the various plots within the site were observed. Some modern disturbance was noted within footings for plots six and eight (Fig. 3) and no finds or deposits of an archaeologically relevant nature were observed. The footings were generally from 0.45-0.6m in width and approximately 1.0m deep, though occasionally dug down to 1.30m deep (Figs 3 and 4).

The stratigraphy seen in the trenches typically consisted of c.0.4m of topsoil above orangey/brown clayey sandy gravels (c.0.4-1.0m+) which were contorted by periglacial action. Some chalk was present at the base of the sequence (Fig. 4). The topsoil layer became slightly thicker the further down slope the site went. No artefacts earlier than the late 19th or 20th centuries were noted (not retained).

Conclusion

Areas of modern disturbance were noted in some of the foundation trenches. No deposits or finds of archaeological interest were revealed during the watching brief.
References
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Figure 1. Location of site within Tilehurst and Berkshire.

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Figure 2. Detailed location of site on Oak Tree Road.

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Figure 3. Detailed location of foundations within site.

Scale: 1:500
38-40 Oak Tree Road, Tilehurst, Reading, 2006

Topsoil and demolition debris

Natural geology
(contorted gravel, with some chalk at base)

Base of trench

Figure 4. Representative section.