
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS LTD

**3-7 SPITTAL STREET, MARLOW
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL
MONITORING & RECORDING**

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| Approved: Claire Halpin MIFA | Project No. 1353 |
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3-7 SPITTAL STREET, MARLOW, BUCKS.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING & RECORDING

SUMMARY

During August 2004, Archaeological Solutions Ltd (AS) carried out a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording during the groundworks associated with development at 3-7 Spittal Street, Marlow, Buckinghamshire. The recording included monitoring of the groundworks to the rear of the site, where a previous archaeological evaluation revealed roughly-hewn chalk blocks, thought possibly to be the remains of a cellar of medieval or post-medieval date.

Foundation Trench 1 revealed the remains of a fragmentary chalk wall (L1003) below layers of post-medieval and modern demolition debris. This confirmed findings from the evaluation (Trench 1), where similar remains were recorded at a similar depth. No datable finds were recovered from L1003. Consequently, a broadly medieval to early post medieval date can still only be posited for the remains of this chalk wall, possibly part of a chalk built cellar.

No evidence of the medieval hospital of St Thomas was recorded despite its probable location in the area of Spittal Street. Indeed no archaeological features or finds predating the post medieval period were revealed.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 During August and September 2004, Archaeological Solutions Ltd (AS) carried out a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording during groundworks associated with a development at 3-7 Spittal Street, Marlow, Buckinghamshire (NGR SU 8485 8664) (Figs. 1 & 2). The work was commissioned by Michael Shanly Homes, as part of a planning condition required by Buckingham County Archaeological Service/Wycombe District Council. The development comprised the refurbishment of the historic buildings fronting Spittal Street, demolition of modern extensions to the rear, and the construction of new office accommodation and two dwellings (Planning Application: 00 / 06425 / FUL) (Fig. 4).

1.2 The archaeological monitoring and recording followed an evaluation conducted by Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust (HAT, now AS) in February 2003. An archaeological desk based assessment had also been prepared for the site (HAT Report No.778).

1.3 The programme of archaeological monitoring and recording was conducted in accordance to a specification prepared by AS (dated 24/06/04), and a brief issued by Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service. It also complied with the IFA's *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (1994, revised 1999).

1.4 The aims of the watching brief were to identify, record and interpret any archaeological remains revealed during the groundworks. In particular attention was given to evidence for the possible medieval/post-medieval chalk-built cellar, located to the rear of the plot during the previous archaeological evaluation.

2 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 The town of Marlow is located on the gravel terrace above the river Thames which borders the historic county of Berkshire to the south (Fig. 1). The town has now expanded beyond its historic core, but despite recent development, it retains many historic buildings along its main streets.

2.2 The site lies within the historic core of Marlow, to the rear of Spittal Street and on the corner of Market Square. To the west it adjoins a large 18th century building, presently occupied by Boots the Chemist, while to the east a small access lane extend to the rear. The whole site occupies approximately 0.046 hectares (460m²).

2.3 The site comprises a number of relatively modern 19th and 20th century buildings, with shop fronts opening onto Spittal Street. To the rear of the site, entirely modern buildings have been constructed.

2.4 The site lies on well-drained flinty coarse loam overlying the gravel, at around c.35m AOD.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Prehistoric finds are abundant in the Thames valley, mostly found during river dredging and possibly representing ritual or secondary deposits. In the area of Marlow, these include polished Neolithic axe heads (SMR 1158), tranchet axes and flints (SMR 1156) and an earlier Mesolithic tranchet axe found to the west of the High Street, which is the earliest surviving evidence for human activity in the area (SMR 2122). Bronze Age barrows and ring ditches are located to the south-west of the town. No prehistoric remains were currently known from the assessment area.

3.2 Although a number of Roman villas are known to exist elsewhere in the Thames valley, material from the area is scarce. No remains were currently known from the assessment area.

3.3 Some evidence for Saxon occupation has been located in and around Marlow. Anglo-Saxon burials have been found at Taplow, 5km to the south-east and Saxo-Norman material recovered during excavations at the Wethered's Brewery (Bonner 1996). Limited domestic rubbish dumping indicate that activity was probably focussed around the medieval parish church and early bridge. The exact size and nature of the settlement at this time remains unclear, and it may have merely been a bridge-side settlement or small village. No remains of this period were currently known to lie within the assessment area, however, the desk based assessment concluded that the site had the potential to ascertain a date for the earliest urban activity in the northern part of the town, which had already been suggested as 11th

century (late Saxon) further to the south (Prosser 2000). Despite this, no late Saxon deposits or finds were recorded during the evaluation.

3.3 At the time of the Norman Conquest, Marlow formed part of a large royal estate. The name recorded in the Domesday Book suggests that the area was marshland at the time. This is supported by a William of Malmesbury, a 12th century source.

3.4 During the 13th century the town had become well established and prosperous, with both a bridge and a market. A hospital dedicated to St Thomas was probably founded at this time, though it only appears once in the historical records (SMR 1157). There is little doubt that Spittal Street marks, as the name implies, the location of the site of the medieval hospital of St Thomas, the exact site of which remains unknown. Documents only attest to the street name from the 16th century onwards. The hospital itself might not have outlived the 14th century.

3.5 The trial trench evaluation (Kier *et al* 2003) revealed a wall comprising roughly hewn chalk blocks to the rear of the property which may have belonged to a chalk cellar of possible medieval or post-medieval date. A similar chalk built cellar was recorded elsewhere in Marlow, at Wethered's Brewery (Bonner 1996), and such cellars may have been a feature of properties in this area, possibly indicative of a local style of construction.

3.6 In the period following the Black Death, Marlow diminished in size. During the Tudor period, however, the town appears to have undergone a resurgence, with thriving trade and many roadside inns. During the 17th century the town grew as many surviving buildings from this period attest. During the 19th century thimble mills were replaced by paper mills and lace-making, attended by three breweries (including Wethereds). During the early 20th century the town saw little upheaval until after the second world war.

3.7 The principal archaeological potential was for further evidence of the potential medieval/post medieval chalk built cellar walling across the site. Additionally, it was important to identify any earlier activity, to provide further evidence for the chronology of urban activity in this part of the town.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 All the main phases of groundworks were monitored by an Archaeological Project Officer, during August/September 2004 (Figs. 3 & 4). These included site clearance/ground reduction, and the excavation of foundation trenches and service trenches.

4.2 Deposits were recorded by means of *pro forma* recording sheets, drawn to scale and photographed as necessary. Excavated spoil was searched for archaeological finds and a metal detector was used to enhance finds recovery.

5 RESULTS

Construction/foundation Trenches 1 and 2 were located in an area to the rear of the site, where the evaluation recorded the remains of a chalk-built cellar. The trenches were amongst the deepest groundworks. The remaining foundation trenches were also monitored, revealing little additional information.

Foundation Trench 1

| | | |
|--------------|-------|--|
| 0.00 – 0.57 | L1000 | Recent made ground: dark brown, loose, silty clay with frequent CBM and moderate chalk and flint |
| 0.57 – 0.87 | L1001 | Modern rubble: a mid brown, friable, silty clay with frequent chalk and mortar, and moderate CBMs. |
| 0.87 – 1.20 | L1002 | A dark brown, compact, silty clay, with frequent CBMs and occasional chalk. 19 th - 20 th century pottery. |
| 1.20 – 1.39+ | L1003 | Densely packed, roughly hewn, chalk pieces to 300mm. Likely the remains of a chalk wall. No finds recovered. |

Description

Recent made ground and rubble were recorded to a depth of approximately 0.87m (L1000). Below L1000 was a rubble layer with 19th/early 20th century pottery (L1001). The earliest context recorded was the possible remains of a chalk wall, similar to that located during the archaeological evaluation in this area of the site, though more fragmentary and possible a demolition layer. Trench 1 was heavily disturbed by tree rooting.

Foundation Trench 2

| | | |
|--------------|-------|---|
| 0.00 – 0.19 | L1004 | Modern layer of brick |
| 0.19 – 0.33 | L1005 | Modern layer: light buff-brown, loose, sandy loam with frequent gravel. |
| 0.33 – 0.72 | L1006 | Dark grey/black, sandy loam, with substantial amounts of chalk (50%) and CBMs (20%) |
| 0.72 – 1.23+ | L1007 | Possible chalk wall: chalk nodules to 90mm, loosely packed, within a mid grey, silty loam matrix. Contained fragments of animal bone. |

Description

Trench 2 revealed a different stratigraphic sequence to Trench 1. There were similar layers of recent made ground, but also another, distinctive layer (L1006) with large amounts of chalk. This layer produced fragments of 19th /early 20th century pottery. L1007 was possibly the continuation of the chalk wall (L1003) recorded in Trench 1. However, the chalk nodules were significantly smaller and were not as densely packed.

Drainage Trenches

The excavation of three shallow drainage trenches was also monitored. One ran the width of the site (SE/NW), approximately 16m long, immediately to the rear of the extant shop front. It was 0.19m deep, truncating a layer of made ground. No

archaeology was recorded. Two further drainage ditches ran NE/SW, approximately 7m and 8m in length. These two were shallow cuts, approximately 0.16m deep, truncating recent made ground. Again, no archaeology was recorded.

6 CONFIDENCE RATING

6.1 It is not felt that any factors hindered the identification of archaeological features or finds during the evaluation/archaeological monitoring and recording.

7 DEPOSIT MODEL

7.1 The underlying geology on the site, recorded during the evaluation phase, was a light to mid-brown sand/gravel. This natural sand/gravel was not recorded in either Foundation Trench 1 or Trench 2.

8 DISCUSSION

8.1 Foundation Trench 1 revealed the remains of a fragmentary chalk wall (L1003) below layers of post-medieval and modern demolition debris. This confirmed findings from the evaluation (Trench 1), where similar remains were recorded at a similar depth. No datable finds were recovered from L1003. Consequently, a broadly medieval to early post medieval date can still only be posited for the remains of this chalk wall, possibly part of a chalk built cellar.

8.2 No firm evidence of the medieval hospital of St Thomas was recorded despite its probable location in the area of Spittal Street. Indeed no dated archaeological features or finds predating the post medieval period were revealed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Archaeological Solutions Ltd would like to thank Michael Shanly Homes for funding the project, including the desk based assessment and trial trench evaluation.

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