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SUMMARY

In August 2003 Foundations Archaeology undertook an archaeological watching brief at 124-126 High Street, Stevenage, Hertfordshire (NGR: TL 23391 24908). The project was commissioned by CgMs Consulting Ltd. on behalf of Laing Homes North Home Counties and comprised mitigation works following the excavation of six evaluation trenches, undertaken in February 2003 (Foundations Archaeology 2003).

The watching brief comprised the observation and recording of two 10m x 10m trenches excavated to remove contaminated land. These trenches were numbered 7 and 8 to complement the numbering utilised in the evaluation (Trenches 1-6). Trench 7 was machined to a depth of 1.5m and Trench 8 to a depth of 0.50m.

Excavation of these trenches revealed several late post-Medieval features, including two heavily truncated pits that could have been linked to a local industry (possibly the tanning process).

The remaining deposits were modern in origin, predominantly consisting of levelling layers. In Trench 7, in particular, it appeared that the earlier features had been truncated as a result of this activity.

GLOSSARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Archaeology

For the purpose of this project, archaeology is taken to mean the study of past human societies through their material remains from prehistoric times to the modern era. No rigid upper date limit has been set, but AD 1900 is used as a general cut-off point.

CBM

Ceramic Building Material.

Medieval

The period between the Norman Conquest (AD 1066) and *circa*. AD 1500.

Natural

In archaeological terms this refers to the undisturbed natural geology of a site, in this case middle chalk.

NGR

National Grid Reference from the Ordnance Survey Grid.

OD

Ordnance datum; used to express a given height above sea-level. (AOD Above Ordnance Datum).

OS

Ordnance Survey.

Post-Medieval

The period after *circa*. AD 1500.

Roman

The period between AD 43 – *circa* AD 410.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of an archaeological watching brief undertaken by Foundations Archaeology from 20th – 22nd August 2003 at 124-126 High Street, Stevenage, Hertfordshire (NGR: TL 23391 24908). The project involved observation of the groundworks associated with the refurbishment of a car show room, the demolition of a workshops and other ancillary buildings of a former garage, followed by the construction of a new residential unit. The project was commissioned by CgMs Consulting Ltd. on behalf of Laing Homes North Home Counties.
- 1.2 The work was undertaken in accordance with a specification prepared by CgMs Consulting Ltd. (Bourne, 2003). The archaeological works were undertaken in response to a condition relating to a planning application submitted by Laing Homes North Home Counties in accordance with Planning & Policy Guidance Note 16 (DoE 1990) and the archaeological policies of Hertfordshire County Council and Stevenage Borough Council. The watching brief was undertaken in accordance with the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994, revised 2001). The code of conduct of the Institute of Field Archaeologists was adhered to throughout.

2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The development comprised the refurbishment of a car showroom, the demolition of workshops and other ancillary buildings of a former garage, followed by the construction of a new residential unit. The proposed development area was bounded by the High Street to the east and Primett Road to the west and covered an area of approximately 0.94ha (Figures 1 and 2). At the time of the project the study area was occupied by an unused car show room, garage workshops and other ancillary buildings. The area within which the trenches were excavated comprised tarmac and concrete hard-standing. The underlying natural geology consists of sands and gravels.
- 2.2 The proposed development site lies within area of Archaeological Significance No. 2, as designated in the Local Plan. This notes evidence that Stevenage was a Medieval Settlement, focused on the High Street, and became an important Medieval and post-Medieval staging post northwards from London. The evaluation located two discrete pits, tentatively dated to the Roman period and a late post-Medieval working pit, possibly associated with industrial activity. An undated north/south aligned linear cut was also identified and partially excavated.
- 2.3 The study area therefore contained preserved archaeological features and deposits, predominantly associated with the Roman and Medieval periods. This in no way prejudiced the watching brief against the recovery of finds or features relating to other periods.

3 AIMS

- 3.1 The aims of the archaeological watching brief were to add to the data gathered during the evaluation from the direct observation of archaeological deposits, in order to provide sufficient information to establish the nature, extent, preservation and potential of any surviving archaeological remains; as well as to make recommendations for management of the resource. In turn this would allow reasonable planning decisions to be taken regarding the archaeological provision for the areas affected by the proposed development.
- 3.2 These aims were achieved through pursuit of the following specific objectives:
- i) To define and identify the nature of archaeological deposits on site, and date these where possible;
 - ii) To attempt to characterise the nature of the archaeological sequence and recover as much information as possible about the spatial patterning of features present on the site;
 - iii) To recover a well dated stratigraphic sequence and recover coherent artefact, ecofact and environmental samples.

4 METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 The excavation of two trenches measuring 10m x 10m were carried out under archaeological supervision. The trenches were excavated to remove contaminated land. The trenches were numbered to run consecutively with the numbering used during the earlier evaluation (Foundations Archaeology 2003). Trench locations are detailed on Figure 2.
- 4.2 Trench 7 was excavated to a depth of 1.5m and Trench 8 to 0.50m. This was achieved through the use of a 360° mechanical excavator with a toothless grading bucket. Thereafter the trenches were recorded and partial excavation of observed features was undertaken, where possible.
- 4.3 All excavation and recording work was undertaken in accordance with the specification prepared by CgMs Consulting Ltd. (Bourne, 2003) and the Foundations Archaeology Technical Manual 3: Excavation Manual.

5 RESULTS

- 5.1 **Trench 7** was excavated onto the natural sands and gravels at a depth of 1.50m (92.10m OD at the southern end and 92.04m OD at the eastern end) below the modern ground surface. The natural sands and gravels were sealed beneath a mid-grey silty-gravel (708), up to 0.64m thick. Overlying this, context (705) consisted of a grey-brown sandy-gravel layer, up to 0.50m thick and containing occasional CBM fragments. Context (701) was a layer of clinker, up to 0.25m thick, which was sealed by the make-up layer for the

tarmac surface (700), up to 0.25m thick. Several cut features were present within the trench.

- 5.2 Feature [702] was a flat based, steep-sided cut observed in the south-facing section of the trench. It measured 1.20m across and 0.80m deep. The feature was cut into layer (701) and sealed beneath layer (700). The cut was modern in origin and contained two fills. The primary fill (704), up to 0.49m thick, consisted of a dark orange-brown sandy-gravel mixed with charcoal/clinker. This was sealed by a secondary fill (703), up to 0.16m thick, which mainly consisted of broken slabs of tarmac. Considering [702] contained 20th century material and was cut into modern dump layers it may be concluded to be a recent feature.
- 5.3 Feature [706] was a shallow (probably heavily truncated) pit with a concave base, observed in the south-facing trench section. It measured 1.0m wide and up to 0.15m deep. It cut into layer (708) and was sealed by (705). The cut contained fill (707), which comprised a loose dump of unfrogged broken brick, measuring 10.5cm wide x 5.0cm thick, CBM fragments and a large number of butchered animal bones. As all the bones observed were from limbs, it was concluded that they might constitute the refuse from an industrial process such as tanning.
- 5.4 Feature [709] was a heavily truncated pit with a concave base, observed in the south-facing section. It measured 0.36m across and up to 0.12m deep. It cut into layer (708), but was truncated by [702] and sealed by (704). It contained the fill (710), up to 0.12m thick, which consisted of a dark brown sandy silt, containing unfrogged broken brick, measuring 11cm wide x 6cm thick, and a large number of cut animal limb bones. As the fill was so similar to that of [706], it was concluded that the two features may be contemporary and have served the same purpose. Both were concluded to be late post-Medieval in date.
- 5.5 Feature [712] was a possible sub-circular pit with a concave base, observed cutting the natural gravels. It measured 0.50m in diameter and up to 0.07m in depth. It contained the fill (713), which consisted of a mid-grey silt sand up to 0.07m thick. It is possible, however, that this feature formed naturally, as no finds were recovered.
- 5.6 Feature [714] was a modern linear cut, observed at the level of the natural gravels. It was vertically sided with an undulating base, measuring 1.73m long, 0.51m wide and up to 0.14m deep, and may have been cut by a toothed bucket. It contained fill (715), a black, heavily contaminated, sandy gravel, which yielded CBM fragments, pottery, animal bone and fragments of tarmac.
- 5.7 Feature [716] was a circular cut, observed at the level of the natural gravels. It was vertically sided, the sides being slightly compacted, and measured 0.20m in diameter. It was excavated to a depth of 0.30m, but the base was not observed at that depth. It contained fill (717), a sticky mid-orange-brown clay. The cut and fill were concluded to be modern in origin and may have been the support and packing of a telegraph pole or similar.

- 5.8 **Trench 8** was excavated to a depth of 0.50m (90.73m OD at the western end and 90.61m OD at the southern end) from the modern ground surface. Late post-Medieval dump layers were sealed beneath modern levelling deposits (800). Layer (810), an orange sand measuring 0.94m north/south x 3.40m east/west, was overlain by (808), a mid-orange-brown sandy gravel, measuring 1.95m north-south x 3.05m east-west. (808) was overlain by (809), a dark brown clay silt, containing charcoal flecks and measuring 10m north-south x 6.10m east-west, this was overlain by (807), which was the same as (705) in Trench 7 and, in Trench 8, measured 2.08m east-west x 1.84m north-south. Several late Post-Medieval features were observed.
- 5.9 Feature [801] was a probable modern linear feature, running east-west and measuring 1.33m long x 0.44m wide. It contained the fill (802), a dark brown sandy silt, containing CBM fragments and charcoal flecks. It was cut into deposit (809) and truncated feature [803].
- 5.10 Feature [803] was a possible Post-Medieval pit, measuring 1.40m long x 1.20m wide and cutting (809). It contained the fill (804), a very loose mid-brown silty sand and gravel, which produced CBM fragments, animal bone, glass and pottery.
- 5.11 Feature [805] was a possible irregular post-Medieval pit or pits, measuring 1.58m long x 1.68m wide. It contained the fill (806), a dark brown silty sandy gravel, which produced animal bone, CBM fragments, pottery and occasional tarmac fragments, which may be residual. It was truncated by [803] and cut (809).
- 5.12 Feature [813] was a probable rectangular pit, measuring 1.06m long x 0.60m wide x up to 0.11m deep. It was cut into layer (815), a mid-brown sandy clay gravel, containing charcoal fragments and occasional flint nodules. [813] was filled by (814), a very loose silty sandy gravel of dark yellowish brown and containing pottery, animal bone, CBM fragments, charcoal flecks and oyster shell.
- 5.13 Feature [816] was a late post-Medieval linear, cut into layer (815) and running approximately east-west. It measured 1.66m long x 0.50m wide and was excavated to a depth of 0.26m. It contained the fill (818), a red, glazed ceramic water pipe, measuring 0.13m in diameter, this was sealed by the fill (817), a silty sandy gravel of dark yellowish brown, containing clinker, pottery and glass. It was excavated to a depth of 0.26m.
- 5.14 Feature [819] was an east-west running linear, cut into layers (812) and (815) and measuring 2.10m long x 0.72m wide. It contained the fill (820), a dark yellow-brown sandy gravel, containing animal bone and CBM fragments.
- 5.15 Layer (811) was a dark brown silty clay, measuring 1.22m north-south x 0.58m east-west and containing charcoal flecks and occasional animal bone. It was very similar to (809) and may be the same deposit. It was overlain by

layer (812) a mid-orange-brown sandy gravel, measuring 2.52m north-south x 1.93m east-west and containing occasional CBM fragments.

6 DISCUSSION

- 6.1 The stratigraphic sequence was essentially uniform throughout, consisting of tarmac/gravel make-up layers overlying the natural sands and gravels. Modern and late post-Medieval disturbance occurred in both trenches.
- 6.2 Of the six features observed in Trench 7 three, [702], [714] and [716], were modern in origin, while feature [712] was probably natural and contained no finds. The remaining two features, [706] and [709], shared similar depths, profiles and fills and were potentially contemporaneous, but were not likely to be much earlier than 18th century in date. It is possible they represented evidence of an industry such as tanning or butchery, close to the site.
- 6.3 Trench 8 was only taken to a depth sufficient to reveal the deposits of mixed dumping, which may be of a date around the 18th and 19th centuries. All features observed within this trench were of modern or post-medieval date: feature [801] was modern in origin, [803] and [805] were possibly 18th or nineteenth century in date, and [813] and [816] were possibly 19th or early 20th century in origin.
- 6.4 Both Trenches 7 and 8 had been subjected to modern disturbance throughout. This disturbance may have been associated with the buildings shown on the 1962 1:1,250 OS map.

7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The watching brief indicated that modern activity had significantly disturbed the south-eastern area of the site. No significant archaeological features or deposits were identified in Trench 8. In Trench 7, however, two features of 18th/19th century date and possibly relating to an industry such as tanning or butchery, were revealed.
- 7.2 The general absence of artefactual evidence relating to the medieval period was probably due to the high level of disturbance, as opposed to a lack of settlement or activity in this area prior to the 18th century.
- 7.3 The features datable to the late post-Medieval/modern period are of limited archaeological significance, although they may provide information regarding the previous uses of the site.

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