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SUMMARY

In September 2002 Foundations Archaeology undertook a programme of archaeological evaluation at Fish Hill, Royston, Hertfordshire (NGR: TL 3580 4055). The project was commissioned by CgMs Consulting on behalf of McCarthy & Stone (Developments) Ltd.

The evaluation comprised the excavation and recording of three 10m x 2m trenches across the proposed development area. These revealed modern disturbance throughout as well as a large cut, [102]. A program of area excavation was thereafter employed in order to define the extent and nature of this feature.

The area excavation revealed two substantial features; the possible cellar to a building datable to the 19th/20th centuries and a Post-Medieval pit containing animal bone waste. Both were probably associated with the livestock auctioning activities that previously took place within the site area.

The results of the evaluation and excavation works suggest, therefore, that no features of earlier than 19th/20th century date survive within the study area. It is likely, therefore, that the proposed development will not affect archaeologically significant features.

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.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of an archaeological evaluation undertaken by Foundations Archaeology in September 2002 at Fish Hill, Royston, Hertfordshire (NGR: TL 3580 4055). The project was commissioned by CgMs Consulting on behalf of McCarthy & Stone (Developments) Ltd.
- 1.2 The work was undertaken in accordance with a specification prepared by CgMs Consulting (2002). The archaeological works were undertaken in response to a condition relating to Planning Application No. 02/0002/1 in accordance with Planning & Policy Guidance Note 16 (DoE 1990) and the archaeological policies of North Hertfordshire District Council. The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluations* 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 proposed development area measured approximately 1000m². The underlying natural geology consists of Middle Chalk (British Geological Survey map 158). All standing buildings had been cleared prior to archaeological evaluation.
- 2.2 The town of Royston is located within an area of intensive archaeological activity, Therfield Heath, to the West, is considered to be one of the best Prehistoric landscapes in Hertfordshire. Ermine Street and Icknield Way cross at Royston with evidence to suggest a settlement at the crossroads. There are relatively large numbers of Anglo-Saxon burials in and around the town.
- 2.3 The study area is in very close proximity to a Priory, established in 1163. The site lies between the Priory and the Medieval town.
- 2.4 The archaeological background for the site is set out in the CgMs Archaeological Desk Based Assessment (2001) which should be read in conjunction with this report.
- 2.5 The study area therefore contained the potential for the preservation of archaeological features and deposits, predominantly associated with the Medieval and Post-Medieval periods. This in no way prejudiced the evaluation works against the recovery of finds or features relating to other periods.

3 AIMS

- 3.1 The aims of the archaeological evaluation were to gather high quality data 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, including further archaeological works if necessary. 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 archaeological specification required the excavation of three trenches measuring 10m by 2m. Trench locations are shown on Figure 2.

4.2 The site had previously been topsoil stripped. Non-significant overburden was then removed under archaeological supervision, to the top of archaeological deposits or natural, whichever was encountered first. This was achieved with the use of a mechanical excavator with a toothless grading bucket. Thereafter the trenches were cleaned and all additional excavation was conducted by hand.

4.3 All excavation and recording work was undertaken in accordance with the specification prepared by CgMs Consulting Ltd. (2002) and the Foundations Archaeology Technical Manual 3: Excavation Manual.

5 RESULTS

Evaluation

5.1 **Trench 1** was aligned approximately north west-south east and was excavated onto the natural chalk at an average depth of 0.21m (64.77m OD at the north western end and 64.89m OD at south eastern end) from the modern ground surface. The natural chalk was sealed beneath a demolition layer (101) up to 0.26m thick, which contained numerous Post-Medieval/modern CBM fragments and pottery sherds. Cut [102] occurred along the south western edge of the trench. An investigative *sondage*, combined with trowel cleaning, indicated that this feature extended beyond the north west, south east and south western edges of the evaluation trench to a minimum depth of 0.5m (see Figure 3). After consultation with the County Archaeologist and CgMs Consulting, the site was machine stripped in order to define the spatial extent

of cut [102] (see **Area 1** below). There were no other archaeological features present within this Trench.

- 5.2 **Trench 2** was aligned approximately north west-south east and was excavated onto the natural chalk at an average depth of 0.21m (65.05m OD at the north western end and 65.4m OD at the south eastern end) from the modern ground surface. The natural chalk was sealed beneath a demolition layer (201) up to 0.23m thick, which contained numerous Post-Medieval/modern CBM fragments and pottery sherds. Modern activity occurred throughout the trench, with heavy root disturbance occurring at the south east end. There were no archaeologically significant features present.
- 5.3 **Trench 3** was aligned approximately south west-north east and was excavated onto the natural chalk at an average depth of 0.39m (66.4m OD at the north eastern end and 66.13m OD at the south western end) from the modern ground surface. The natural chalk was sealed beneath a demolition layer (301) up to 0.52m thick, which contained numerous Post-Medieval/modern CBM fragments and pottery sherds. Modern activity, including two wall cuts, and heavy root disturbance occurred throughout the trench. There were no archaeologically significant features present.

Excavation

- 5.4 **Area 1** was machine stripped to the top of the chalk natural and archaeological deposits (Figure 4). The extent and morphology of [102] was defined as a rectangular cut, with an approximate area of at least 100m squared. The north western edge, nearest the site-boundary wall, was not exposed due to Health and Safety reasons. A hand dug section across the feature revealed multiple fills and an earlier cut, [114], which appeared to form an element of [102].
- 5.5 Feature [114] was a vertical sided, flat base cut containing fills (112), (113) and (111). It was present at an approximate depth of 1.0m below the top of the natural deposits and was cut a further 0.9m into the solid chalk natural. A step, cut into the natural chalk, was visible at both the north east and south west ends of the section.
- 5.6 The base fill of [114] was (112), which consisted of a light grey sand, up to 0.38m thick, which contained frequent chalk lumps mixed with occasional light-beige mortar. The fill yielded numerous artefacts including occasional CBM fragments, iron nails, glass, animal bone and glazed ceramics datable to the 19th/20th centuries. This fill was overlain by (113), a loose grey brown sand, up to 0.40m thick, which contained frequent chalk lumps and flint pieces. This context was heavily root disturbed and contained frequent CBM fragments and pottery sherds of 19th/20th century date. Fill (111) formed the uppermost fill of [114] and the base fill of [102] and consisted of a loose, white chalk matrix, up to 0.07m thick. Artefactual evidence was limited to occasional CBM fragments.

- 5.7 The earliest distinct fills of [102] sealed fill (111). These consisted of (109), a light grey sand silt with patches of re-deposited natural, up to 0.22m thick. Artefacts recovered from this layer included occasional charcoal and CBM flecks, along with an iron nail. Fill (110) was a grey silt clay, up to 0.15m thick, yielding bone, oyster shell, tile and glazed CBM fragments. Both of these fills overlaid (111) but had no direct relationship to each other. Context (109) was overlaid by fills (108), (105), (103) and (104).
- 5.8 Fill (108) was a mid brown clay silt, up to 0.50m thick, which contained occasional large CBM fragments, animal bone, and pottery datable to the Post-Medieval period. Fill (105) consisted of a light brown clay silt with patches of re-deposited chalk, up to 0.25m thick, which yielded frequent charcoal flecks, occasional CBM, fragments of bone and early Post-Medieval pottery. This context formed an interface between fills (103) and (108). Fill (103) comprised of a compact, light beige chalk matrix, up to 0.22m thick, which contained numerous CBM fragments. These were most frequent at the interface with context (104). Fill (104) was a mid brown grey silty clay, up to 0.60m thick, which contained an iron scythe, charcoal flecks, bone, glass, iron nails, frequent large tile fragments and pottery attributable to the Post-Medieval period.
- 5.9 Context (110) was overlaid by (104), (106) and (107). Fill (106) consisted of a very compact, light beige chalk, up to 0.9m thick. Artefactual evidence from this context consisted of early Post-Medieval pottery, occasional, small CBM and charcoal flecks and numerous animal bone fragments. Fill (107) was a light grey brown silty clay, up to 0.90m thick, which contained an iron link-chain, animal bone, brick, iron nails, oyster shell and pottery datable to the early Post-Medieval period. Large brick and tile fragments occurred throughout the visible extent of this fill.
- 5.10 A substantial pit, [115] was also present in Area 1. This was a steep sided, flat based, oval pit measuring 4.4m long by 2.5m wide and 0.5m deep. This cut contained a uniform fill (116) which consisted of a light brown clay silt, up to 0.50m thick, which contained numerous animal bone fragments (forming approximately 20-30% of the total fill). Post-Medieval pottery sherds and CBM were fragments present throughout the fill.

6 DISCUSSION

- 6.1 Evaluation trenching and subsequent area stripping revealed two features; [102] and [115], both securely dated to the 19th/20th century. Cut [102], probably representing a basement, was delimited at the south eastern edge by a wall cut containing red bricks with flint inclusions. The same type of brick was also present in part of the north western site-boundary wall with clearly different bricks on either side. It is possible, therefore, that this represents the substantially intact end wall to a building that was originally present above [102]. No wall cuts were evident along the north eastern and south western edges. The absence of foundation cuts along the long axis of [102] suggests that the building may have formed a relatively lightweight structure supported

by the end walls, possibly with a series of upright supports, although no evidence of postholes was recovered. It would be unusual for an open shed-type building to contain a basement and it is therefore more likely that side walls were originally present with shallow foundations, which were removed during the demolition of the building. It is possible, but unlikely, that the feature represents a large rectangular pit unassociated with any structure.

- 6.2 Dating evidence recovered from the earliest fills of [102] suggests that the feature was infilled during the 20th century and that any demolition works are also likely to be of recent date. Although there is no cartographic evidence to support the presence of a building in this location, it is entirely possible that the structure was very short-lived, being both constructed and demolished, between phases of Ordnance Survey mapping.
- 6.3 Cut [115] is also securely dated to the Post-Medieval period. The high amount of animal bone inclusions within fill (116) is probably the result of this feature's association with livestock activity on the site during the Post-Medieval/modern period.

7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The trenches were sited to provide a representative sample across the development zone, with an open area excavation focused on the area of cut [102]. Both features, [102] and [115], are securely datable to the Post-Medieval/modern period and are of limited archaeological significance.
- 7.2 The evaluation has indicated that, although modern disturbance has occurred across the site, this has had little impact on the top of the chalk and preservation conditions may be considered favourable for features cut into natural. No archaeological features were present within the study area dating to earlier than the Post-medieval/modern periods.
- 7.3 The general absence of artefactual evidence pre-dating the Post-medieval period, either stratified or unstratified, indicates an absence of early settlement within the area encompassed by the present evaluation. A number of early Post-medieval pottery sherds were recovered from the latest backfill layers of [102]. It is possible that these originated from elsewhere within the site area and were disturbed during demolition and backfilling works, but it is equally possible that they were brought onto the site with imported backfill.
- 7.4 The results of the evaluation and excavation works suggest, therefore, that no features of earlier than 19th/20th century date survive within the study area. It is likely, therefore, that the proposed development will not affect archaeologically significant features.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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APPENDIX 1 Pottery Report

For: Foundations Archaeology
Site: Royston, Hertfordshire
Site Code: FHR 02
Status: Assessment

THE POTTERY

A small assemblage of some 23 sherds weighing 1067 g was recovered from four contexts. All the pottery appears to date to the early post-medieval period. The sherds were generally well preserved although some showed fresh breaks. The largest group came from (116), some 20 sherds largely comprising glazed and unglazed red earthenwares. At least three sherds came from the base of a cistern with a bung-hole. Also present was the upper part of a jar-like vessel perforated by a series of holes made before firing which may be a fuming pot. Context (104) contains a single potsherd, the fluted base of a German stoneware jar imported into Britain in quantity from the 16th century. Also from this context was a fragment of flat roofing tile. Further earthenware with glaze splatters came from (106) and a small fragmented sandy ware from (107).

Dr Jane Timby
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