

**NEW CLOSE CARE DWELLINGS, PONDSMEAD NURSING
HOME, OAKHILL, ASHWICK, MENDIP, SOMERSET**

Archaeological Observations and Recording



Report No. 53247/3/1

May 2007

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April–May 2007**

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SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief was carried out by Terrain Archaeology in April and May 2007 during the groundworks associated with the erection of new close care dwellings at Pondsmead Nursing Home, Oakhill, Ashwick, Mendip, Somerset. No features or deposits of archaeological interest were observed. Much of the site had been previously disturbed by the erection of greenhouses and outbuildings associated with and probably built at the same time as Pondsmead House.

INTRODUCTION

Terrain Archaeology was commissioned by Wright Associates Limited, on behalf of Crabb Construction (acting for the respective owners) to undertake a programme of archaeological observations and recording during groundworks associated with the erection of new Close Care Units on land at Pondsmead Nursing Home, Oakhill, Ashwick, Mendip, Somerset (Planning Application No. 104520/042). The archaeological works were undertaken to fulfil Condition 7 of the Approved Planning Application No. 104520/042, which states that “No development shall commence on site until a programme of archaeological work, including excavations, has been implemented in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been first submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.”

Archaeological Observations and Recording, also known as an archaeological watching brief, is defined by the Institute of Field Archaeologists as “a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons, within a specified area or site where there is a possibility that archaeological deposits may be disturbed or destroyed.”

The development consisted of the erection of two blocks of buildings in the garden to the west of Pondsmead Nursing Home. Block A was situated near to the southwest corner of the nursing home whilst Block B lay at the western edge of the garden.

The site is situated in the garden to the west of Pondsmead Nursing Home centred on NGR ST 6344347189. It lies on land that slopes down gently to the west at a height of about 215m above Ordnance Datum. Pondsmead Nursing Home lies on the southern side of Oakhill (Figure 1).

The fieldwork was carried out between the 4th April and 8th May 2007 by Steven Tatler.

Terrain Archaeology would like to acknowledge the help and cooperation of the following during this project: David M Cole (Wright Associates Limited), Jason Ashenden, Jeremy Crabb (Crabb Construction Limited).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The site lies in the grounds of Pondsmead House, which, along with its lakeside features, summer house and lodge, is an important 19th century pleasure. The house, summer house, and lodge are all Grade II Listed Buildings and lie close to the development site. Further to the south, the dam

and archway associated with a series of ponds with grottos and other lakeside features are also Grade II Listed structures. The following is largely taken from the List descriptions.

Pondsmead House (now Pondsmead Nursing Home) was built in 1874 by T. L. Banks for Fredrick Spencer of Oakhill Brewery. It is a large detached house with an asymmetrical plan in the Domestic Revival style. It has two stories, with attics, and is constructed from squared coursed rubble with planted frame, rendered to the upper part and with a tiled roof.

The summer house lies immediately southwest of Pondsmead House (Figure 2). It was built in the early 19th century from part rendered rubble and randomly laid tufa. It has a single storey with a pyramidal tiled roof and weather vane. The attached outbuilding has a conical thatched roof.

The rather unusual and eccentric Lodge lies to the southeast of Pondsmead House and was built in the early 19th century in cottage orné style. It has a single storey, with attic, is roughly circular in plan and built of rough-hewn randomly laid tufa. It has a slate roof with five slopes, two gabled dormers, eaves swept at odd angles and a central chimney stack.

One previous archaeological intervention has been recorded in the immediate vicinity of the site. During the construction of an extension to the nursing home in 1999 an archaeological watching brief was carried out by C. and N. Hollinrake. This located several walls of 18th century date probably relating to a brewery and malthouse shown on the 1840 Tithe map (Hollinrake 1999). These buildings would have been demolished during the construction of Pondsmead House in the late 19th century.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The objective of the archaeological observations was to establish and make available information about the archaeological resource existing on the site.

The archaeological works aimed to observe and record all the *in situ* archaeological deposits and features revealed during the groundworks to an appropriate professional standard.

METHODS

The work was undertaken in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation produced by Terrain Archaeology (Document No. 3227/0/1), and the Institute of Field Archaeologists *Code of Conduct and Standard and guidance for archaeological watching briefs* (1994, as revised).

The observations of the groundworks were intensive, as defined by the Institute of Field Archaeologists, with a suitably qualified archaeologist present during all sensitive ground disturbance.

Observations were made during the excavation of test pits to check for contamination (by Tweedie Evans) and machine stripping to level the area containing Block A. The area containing Block B was stripped before observations could be made. The groundworks included terracing into the underlying limestone natural in the eastern halves of both Block A and Block B.

All features and deposits, exposed during the works, were recorded using components of the Terrain Archaeology recording system of complementary written, drawn and photographic records

The records, and any materials recovered, have been compiled in a stable, cross-referenced and fully indexed archive in accordance with current UKIC guidelines.

RESULTS

Introduction

Observations were made during the excavation of six test pits to check for soil contamination and during the stripping of the areas of Blocks A and B prior to trenching for footings (Figure 2). It was deemed unnecessary to observe the excavation of the footing trenches, as the machine stripping was of sufficient depth to expose the underlying natural deposits and expose any archaeological remains that may have survived.

Test Pits

A total of six test pits were excavated by Tweedie Evans to check for contamination, three in the footprint of Block A and three in the footprint of Block B (Figure 2).

The test pits in Block A were approximately 2.2 m long, 0.5 m wide and between 0.6 m and 1.6 m deep (Plates 1–3). The underlying natural consisted of fragmented limestone bedrock covered with up to 0.5 m of natural red clay. In the western half of the area (Test Pits 1 and 3) this was overlain by up to 0.7 m of mixed building rubble (including limestone blocks, pieces of brick and concrete, iron pipes, wood and plastic) derived from the demolition of a greenhouse. In the southwest corner of the area (Test Pit 1) this was sealed by a mid brown silty clay loam dumped topsoil up to 0.45m thick. In the eastern half of the site (Test Pit 2) a layer of concrete, up to 0.1m thick, had been laid directly on the red clay natural as a car park.

The test pits in Block B were between 2–3 m long, 0.5 m wide and between 1.5–2.4 m deep (Plates 4–6). The underlying natural consisted of red clay containing occasional large blocks of limestone. In the southwest corner of the area (Test Pit 4) this was sealed by a mixed deposit, up to 0.3 m thick, of red clay, limestone fragments and cinders, probably associated with a previous greenhouse. In the northwest corner of Block B the natural clay was overlain by a dark brown silty clay loam, up to 0.7 m thick, containing frequent pieces of brick, tile, flowerpot and limestone, probably associated with horticultural activities in the area.

Block A

Block A lay immediately west of the southern end of Pondsmead House and north of the summer house (Figure 2). The underlying natural exposed during stripping consisted of limestone bedrock overlain by up to 0.5 m of natural red clay (Plates 7–9). Along the eastern edge of the area up to 1.5 m of the limestone bedrock was removed during levelling. In the northeast corner of the site a large cast iron water pipe aligned NW–SE was uncovered (Figure 2) and thought to be associated with large underground water tanks observed by the contractor at the northern end of the property. To the west of this, were two wall footings (101, 103), aligned N–S, which appeared to terminate approximately six metres into the site (Figure 2). Both were cut into the natural clay and were constructed using limestone slabs bonded with cement mortar. In the eastern half of the area the natural clay was overlain by a spread of mixed building rubble (also observed in Test Pits 1 and 3), which in some places appeared to be infilling voids cut into the clay.

Block B

Block B lay to the west of Block A, at the western edge of the site (Figure 2). The underlying natural in Block B was similar to Block A with the limestone bedrock appearing to dip down steeply to the northwest as indicated by the depth of red clay in the test pits. The limestone bedrock was excavated to a depth of two metres along the eastern edge of the area during levelling (Plates 10–11). Along the western edge of the stripped area, evidence for previous

structures was observed outside the building footprint. This probably relates to earlier greenhouses and out buildings. In the northeast corner of the area was the remains of a large concrete floor dug into the natural clay and thought to relate to a demolished greenhouse or out building (Figure 2).

Finds

No finds were retained from this watching brief.

CONCLUSIONS

No features or deposits of archaeological significance were observed during this watching brief. The large spread of building rubble found in Block A derives from a recently demolished greenhouse, which probably dated to the late 19th century. The two wall footings in the eastern half of Block A probably relate to this greenhouse or an earlier layout of the gardens. Areas of disturbance in Block B also probably relate to earlier greenhouses and out buildings as seen on the 1886 and 1903 Ordnance Survey maps of this area.

REFERENCES

- Hollinrake, C and N 1999 "Pondsmead Nursing Home, Oakhill". *Unpublished report No 157*



Figure 1: Site location map

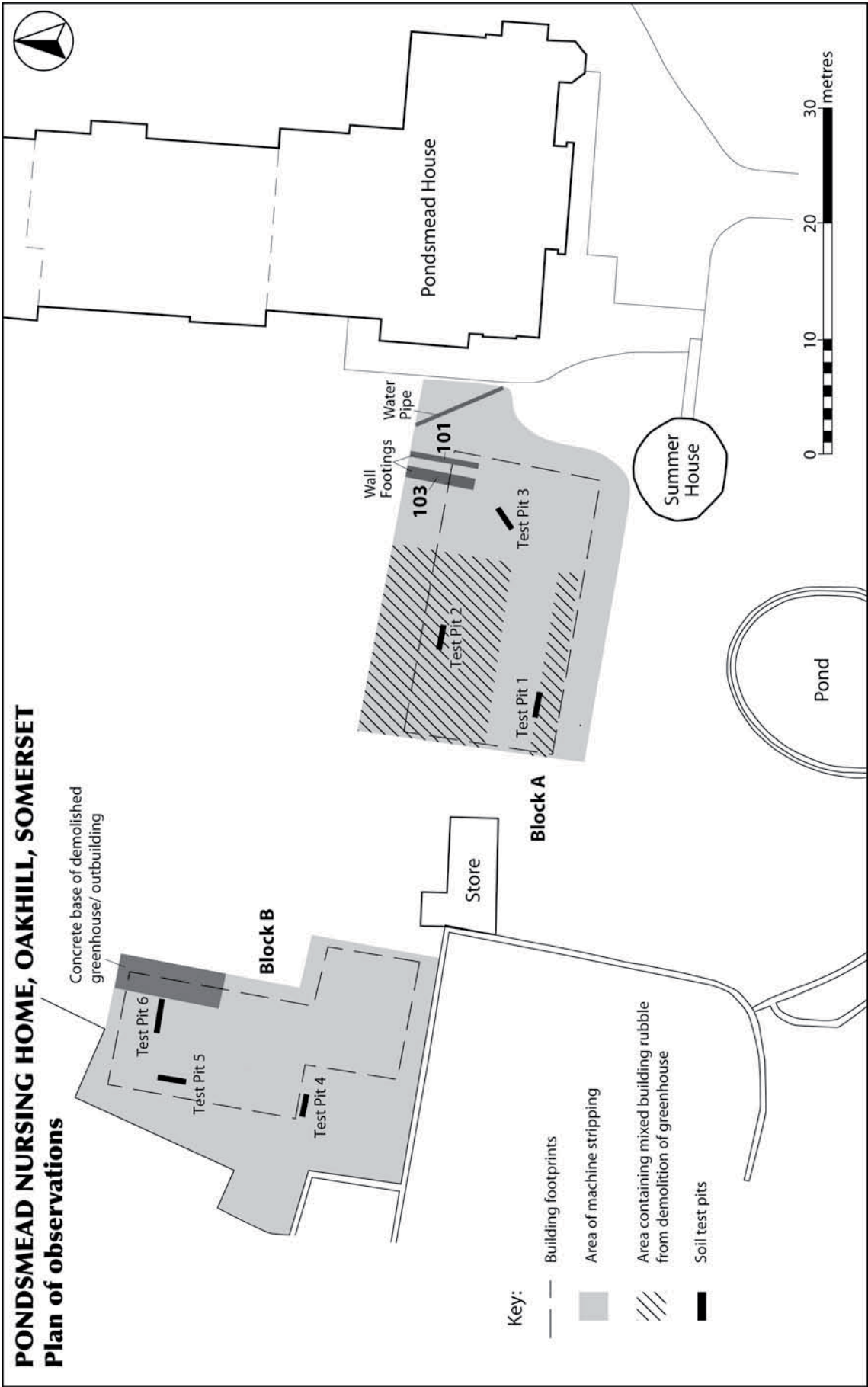


Figure 2: Plan showing area of watching brief



*Plate 1: Test Pit 1 –
north facing section.*



*Plate 2: Test Pit 2 –
southeast facing section.*



*Plate 3: Test Pit 3 –
south facing section.*



*Plate 4: Test Pit 4 –
south facing section.*



*Plate 5: Test Pit 5 –
west facing section.*



*Plate 6: Test Pit 6 –
south facing section.*



*Plate 7: Block A –
east end of area*



*Plate 8: Block A –
centre of area*



*Plate 9: Block A –
west end of area*



*Plate 10: Block B –
south half of area*



*Plate 11: Block B –
north half of area*