

49 FITZMAURICE ROAD, CHRISTCHURCH, DORSET
Archaeological Observations and Recording



Report No. 53159.1

December 2004

49 Fitzmaurice Road, Christchurch, Dorset

Archaeological Observations, December 2004

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49 Fitzmaurice Road, Christchurch, Dorset

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SUMMARY

Archaeological observations and recording were carried out by Terrain Archaeology during the construction of a new block of flats with car parking to the rear at 49 Fitzmaurice Road, Christchurch (SZ14359372). Ordnance Survey maps record the site of a tumulus in the northern part of the development.

No traces of a round barrow or any other prehistoric features or finds were found. A small number of probable 20th century features associated with the garden of the former house on the site were investigated.

INTRODUCTION

Terrain Archaeology was commissioned by Holton Homes to undertake archaeological observations and recording during the construction of a new block of flats and associated parking at the rear of 49 Fitzmaurice Road, Christchurch.

The development comprised the demolition of the house that had formerly stood on the site, the construction of a new block of flats with a parking area and soakaway to the rear. The archaeological observations were limited to the groundworks associated with the new extension.

‘Archaeological Observations and Recording’ (or ‘watching brief’) is 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 site lies on the former Jumpers Common. It is situated on the northern side of Fitzmaurice Road, in the northern part of Christchurch at NGR SZ14359372, on the northeastern side of the Stour valley (Figure 1). The site comprises a recently demolished house and garden. It is some 300 m to the north of the River Stour, on a low-lying spur of land between the confluence of the Rivers Stour and Avon. The ground slopes down to the southwest, and the site lies at about 4 m above Ordnance Datum. The underlying geology is mapped as fourth terrace river gravels. The site is bounded to the northeast by the garage and garden wall of a newly-built house (No. 12 Eleanor Gardens).

The fieldwork was carried out on 7th December 2004 by Peter Bellamy and Rebecca Montague.

Terrain Archaeology would like to acknowledge Mr Paul Bloomfield, the groundwork contractors, and Steven Wallis (Dorset County Council) for their help and cooperation during this project.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The site lies on the 4th terrace gravels of the Stour, from which a number of Palaeolithic finds have been made in the general vicinity of the site. Lower Palaeolithic material has been found at Cedar Avenue, about 500 m west of the site (Wymer 1999) and an Upper Palaeolithic site has been found at Bendigo Road, about 300 m north of the site (Barton 1992).

There is considerable evidence for archaeological activity in region surrounding the site dating from the Early Neolithic to the Bronze Age, much of it in the form of scatters of flint and pottery (Gardiner 1987).

The 1872 Ordnance Survey 6-inch map records the remains of a tumulus, presumably a Bronze Age round barrow (Dorset SMR– Christchurch no. 75), in the vicinity of the site (Figure 2).

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 carried out in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation for the project (Document 3159), prepared by Terrain Archaeology in June 2004 (Appendix 1). It was undertaken in line with the Institute of Field Archaeologists *Standard and guidance for archaeological watching briefs*.

The groundworks comprised the stripping under archaeological supervision of the area at the rear of the site where the proposed car park and soakaway were to be located, and where the former round barrow was assumed to be located. The area stripped was restricted by the presence of piles of rubbish, a mature tree to the northwest of the site and by a portacabin to the southeast.

The area was stripped by a tracked mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket down to the surface of the natural deposits. The amount over topsoil and overburden removed varied from 0.20 m to 0.45 m in depth.

The house had already been demolished, and as the flats were to be constructed in the area where the previous house had stood, archaeological observation was not undertaken here, as archaeological features were considered unlikely to have survived in this area.

A trench c. 0.40 m deep was excavated along the western side of the drive for a water pipe. The section revealed overburden, with natural sand encountered at the base of the deposit. No archaeological features were visible in the sections. An area along the street frontage of the pottery was cleared down to just below the top of the retaining wall. This revealed only recent levelling material.

All deposits exposed in the stripped area to the rear of the site were recorded using elements of Terrain Archaeology's recording system of complementary written, drawn and photographic records. The position of the stripped area was located on a plan provided by the client.

The records have been compiled in a stable, cross-referenced and fully indexed archive in accordance with current UKIC guidelines and the requirements of the receiving museum. The archive will be deposited with the Dorset County Museum.

RESULTS

Natural Deposits

The natural deposit in this area was a silvery grey sand with very occasional flint gravels <0.02 m across. These were mottled a slightly darker, almost ashy-looking grey in some places.

Pit 1

This was located at the northern part of the stripped area, and was a large sub-oval feature measuring 2.6 m by 1.5 m, and was 0.9 m deep (Figure 3). Its sides were steep but slightly irregular, and it was filled with dark greyish brown loose sand (2) with very occasional flint gravels <0.02 m across and quantities of brick, tile, slate, glass, iron, clinker and pottery. The pottery was 19th/20th century industrial white earthenwares, and there were fragments of engineering bricks present, suggesting a probable 20th century date for the feature.

Tree hole 3

This feature was situated 5 m south of Pit 1, and was a sub oval shallow feature measuring 1.80 m by 1.06 m across and 0.10 m deep. It had shallow sides and an uneven base, and was filled with a pale greyish brown fill (4) with very occasional small flint gravels and fragments of ceramic building material, industrial earthenware pottery, animal bone and clinker. There were many roots present in the fill. The uneven profile of the feature suggests that this is a natural feature, possibly a tree hole.

Feature 5

A small feature 0.8 m to the south of pit 1 was also investigated. After cleaning, this feature resembled a posthole in plan: it was sub-circular, 0.4 m in diameter. However, it was only 0.03 m deep and appeared to be a natural feature as its base was very uneven with root disturbance and a piece of modern glass was recovered from its fill. Another possible posthole close by was even more ephemeral as it disappeared after cleaning, and possibly represents an infilling in a slight hollow in the surface of the natural.

Dump/levelling layers

At the northeastern part of the site was a layer of dark greyish brown loose sand (8) with frequent clinkers, small gravels and charcoal and clinker. It had a maximum depth of 0.20 m, and probably represents a dumping or levelling episode.

Along the frontage of the site, up to about a metre of relatively recent filling and levelling layers of sandy soil were exposed during the laying of a water pipe (Plate 3). This probably represents the landscaping of the site associated with the construction of the original house on the site.

Garden soils

Overlying all the deposits and features described above was a 0.2 m thick layer of dark greyish brown sandy loam (9), a very humic and well-developed garden soil.

Finds

A large quantity of material was recovered from Pit 1 (see above). However, as all these were 19th/20th century in date, none was retained. Similarly, the few finds from tree hole 3 were not retained.

CONCLUSIONS

No prehistoric features were exposed, and no worked flint was noted in the spoil. No trace of the barrow was observed. The precise location of this monument is unclear and it may not have existed on the present site.

The features exposed probably relate to the 20th century occupation of this area, after the construction of the house on the site. The garden was full of fruit trees at the time of clearance of the site for redevelopment.

PROJECT ARCHIVE

The archive (Terrain Archaeology Project No. 53159) will be deposited with Dorset County Museum, which has agreed in principle to accept the archive, subject to fulfilment of the Museum's requirements of the preparation of archaeological archives. A copy of the microfilmed archive will be deposited with the National Monuments Record.

REFERENCES

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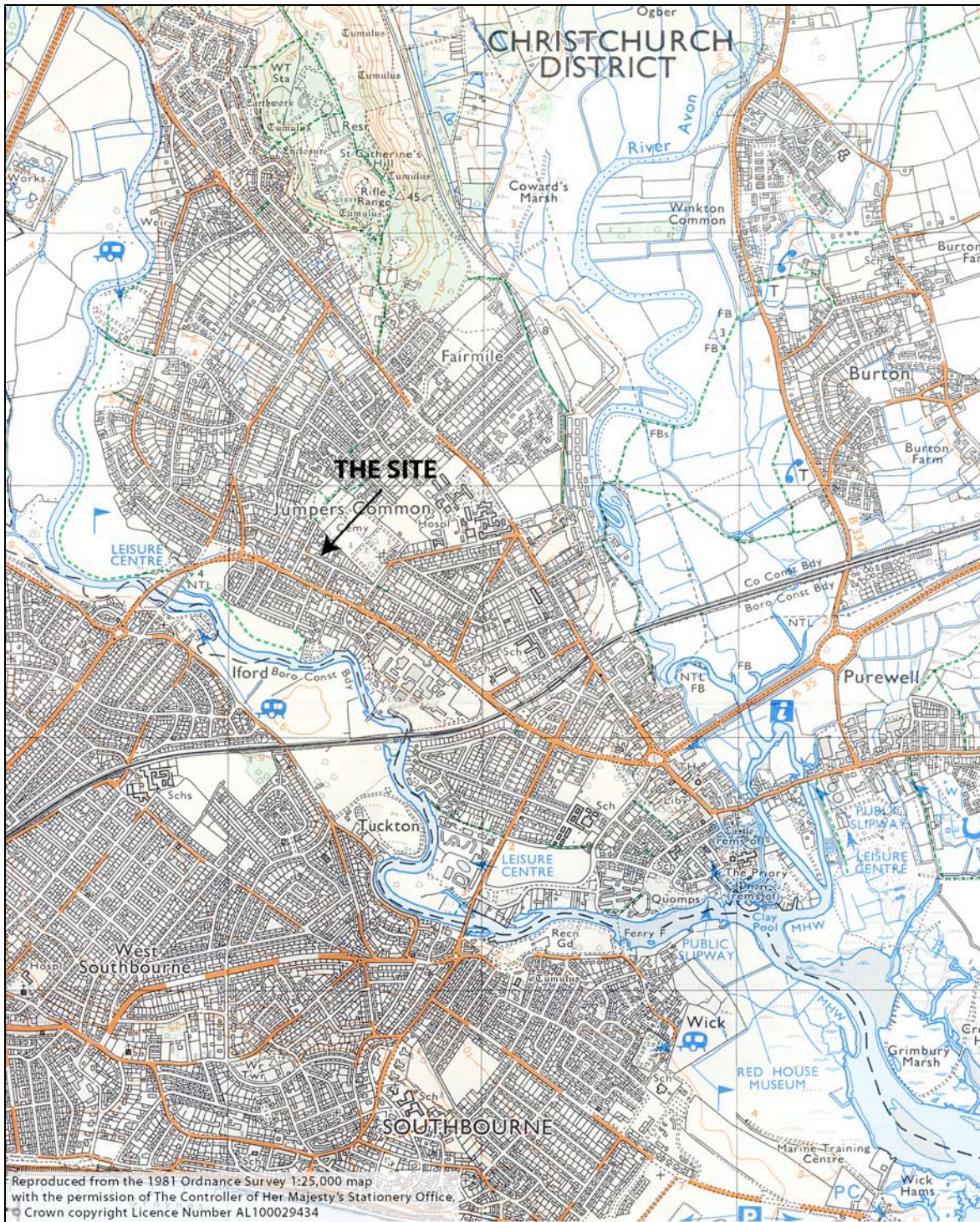


Figure 1: Location Map

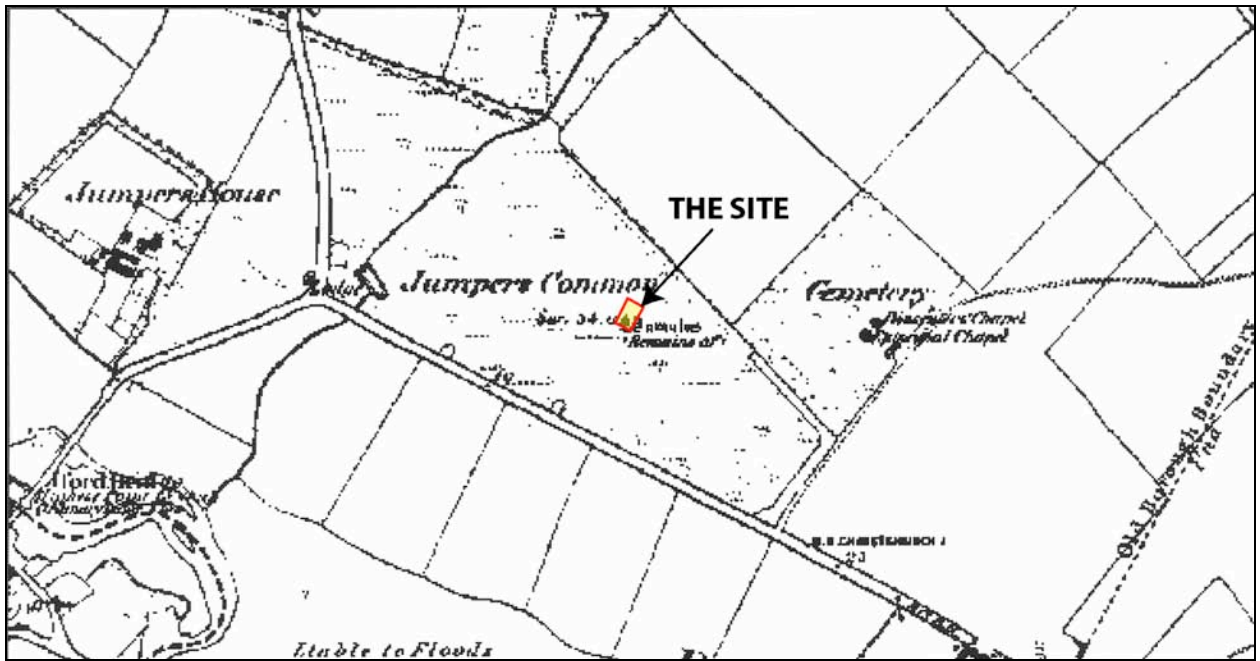


Figure 2: Extract from 1872 Ordnance Survey 6-inch County Series Map, First Edition. (© Copyright Landmark Information Group Ltd and Ordnance Survey Crown Copyright 2004. All Rights Reserved ©)

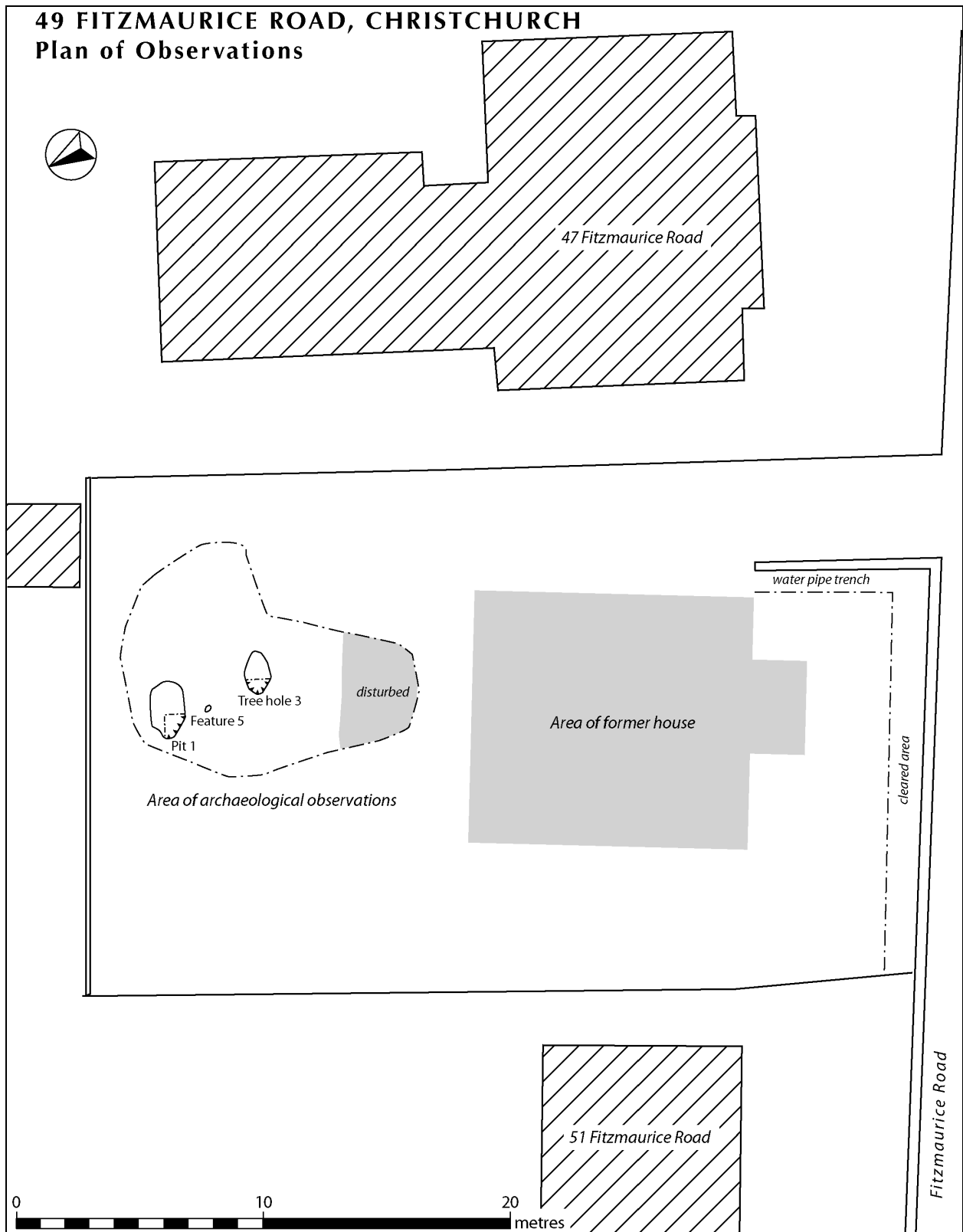


Figure 3: Plan of site showing observed areas



Plate 1: General view of stripped area looking northeast.



Plate 2: View of stripped area after excavation, looking north.



Plate 3: View of deposits at the street frontage during the insertion of a water pipe, looking southwest.

APPENDIX 1: WRITTEN SCHEME OF INVESTIGATION