



18 SWEETHILL ROAD, SOUTHWELL, PORTLAND, DORSET
Archaeological Evaluation



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18 Sweethill Road, Southwell, Portland, Dorset

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SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken in the garden of 18 Sweethill Road, Southwell, Portland (SY68447002). Two trenches were excavated. Both trenches revealed garden deposits immediately overlying the natural base. No archaeological finds, features, or deposits were encountered.

INTRODUCTION

This project was commissioned by Paul Scott, Architect, acting as agent for Medway Homes Ltd, as part of the Planning Application for the residential development of the site. An archaeological evaluation was requested by Weymouth & Portland Borough Council, the local planning authority, following advice from Steven Wallis, Senior Archaeologist, Dorset County Council. This is in line with Planning and Policy Guidance Note 16 (Archaeology and Planning).

The site is situated off the northern side of Sweethill road at SY68447002 (Figure 1). It lies on the lower northern slopes of Sweethill at a height of about 47 m above Ordnance Datum. The site was occupied by a house at the front of the property, with a garden behind. The garden had been terraced and was on three levels, with a retaining wall to the rear. The evaluation was confined to the middle terrace, which occupies most of the garden (Figure 1). The rear wall of the garden was an old drystone wall, probably the original wall of the close that existed here prior to the residential development along Sweethill Road (Figure 2). At the time of the evaluation, the house had been demolished and much of the garden had been cleared by machine.

The fieldwork was carried out on 1st October 2002 by Peter Bellamy and Steven Tatler.

Terrain Archaeology would like to acknowledge Paul Scott, Architect, and Medway Homes Ltd for their help and cooperation during this project.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The earliest evidence for activity in the area dates from the Mesolithic period (c. 8000–4000BC). An important Late Mesolithic site has been excavated at Culverwell (Palmer 1999) about 700 m to the south and a sparse scatter of possible Mesolithic worked chert has been found on the northern slopes of Sweethill itself to the west of the site (Terrain Archaeology 1999).

Important evidence of Early Neolithic (c. 4000–3700BC) occupation has recently been found by Terrain Archaeology on the northern slopes of Sweethill; about 250 m to the west, where the remains of a rectangular house with an associated pit with burnt hazelnut shells and grain have recently been excavated (Terrain Archaeology 2000a).

In the bottom of the coombe to the north of Sweethill, two burnt mounds of probable Late Neolithic/ Early Bronze Age date (c. 2600–1600BC) has been excavated by Terrain Archaeology (Terrain Archaeology 2000b). Further evidence of Bronze Age activity has been noted from Suckthumb Quarry (RCHME 1970,450).

Iron Age and Romano-British period occupation appears to be centred on Avalanche Road and the Sweet Hill Lane housing estate (RCHME 1970, 607–8; Putnam 1970). However, a number of

Roman burials, including one in a stone sarcophagus, have been found immediately adjacent to the site on Sweet Hill Road (RCHME 1970, 608). A scatter of Roman pottery has also been found along this road.

Evidence for medieval occupation in Southwell is concentrated on Sweethill Road. Limpet shell midden deposits associated with 12th-13th century pottery have been found at the lower end of Sweet Hill Road and at the top end immediately adjacent to the site.

In the medieval and early post-medieval periods, the site lay within the open field system of Portland, in what was known as the 'Great West Field'. The 1842 Tithe Map shows that the site had been enclosed by this date. Evidence from investigations by Terrain Archaeology at the top of Sweethill Road suggests that this enclosure may be dated to the late 18th century (Terrain Archaeology 2002).

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The objective of the archaeological works was to evaluate the archaeological potential of the site, that is, to appraise the nature, extent, level of preservation, and importance of any archaeological deposits.

The evaluation aimed to record all the in situ archaeological deposits and features revealed during the works in order to provide sufficient data to assess the archaeological significance of the site.

METHODS

The archaeological works were carried out in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists' Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation (1994, rev. 1999). However, no written brief or specification for the project was produced. The number, size and location of the evaluation trenches was determined by Steven Wallis, Senior Archaeologist, Dorset County Council.

The evaluation comprised two trenches 5 m long by 1.90 m wide, excavated in the locations determined by Steven Wallis, Senior Archaeologist, Dorset County Council as shown on Figure 1.

The trenches were cleared of recent overburden by a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket, down on to the top of any in situ archaeological deposits, or the natural subsoil, whichever was encountered first.

All archaeological deposits and features exposed during the works were cleaned by hand, then planned and recorded. Excavation of archaeological deposits and features was limited to resolving questions relating to their date, nature, extent and condition

All deposits revealed, irrespective of their apparent archaeological significance, were recorded using components of the Terrain Archaeology recording system of complementary written, drawn and photographic records.

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, Dorset County Museum.

RESULTS

Trench 1

A thin layer of yellowish-brown clay loam garden soil, 0.12 m thick, overlay a series of deposits of natural clay, decayed rock and sandy clays, typical of the upper part of the geological sequence in this part of Portland (Figure 3; Plate 2).

Trench 2

Overlying the natural clays and decayed rock was a 0.2 m thick layer of yellowish-brown clay loam with frequent small brick fragments and charcoal flecks and occasional small limestone pieces. This was probably the remains of the original soil prior to the original development of the site. It was covered by a layer of mixed brownish-yellow clay with flecks and patches of decayed limestone about 0.18 m thick, which was probably redeposited natural used to level up the eastern end of the garden. Overlying this was a layer of yellowish brown clay loam garden soil, which gradually merged with the lower buried soil layer to the west of the trench (Figure 3; Plate 3).

Finds

No finds were recovered from the evaluation.

CONCLUSIONS

No significant archaeological features or deposits were encountered during the evaluation. The site had been terraced and the thin garden soils lay directly on top of the natural subsoils.

PROJECT ARCHIVE

The archive (Terrain Archaeology Project No. 53100) 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.

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