

**NEW BUILDING AT WESTFIELD, REAP LANE,
SOUTHWELL, PORTLAND, DORSET**

Archaeological Observations and Recording



Report No. 53302/3/1

April 2009

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March 2009**

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New Building at Westfield, Reap Lane, Southwell, Portland, Dorset

Archaeological Evaluation, March 2009

SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief was carried out by Terrain Archaeology in March 2009, during the excavation of foundation trenches for a new chicken shed and workshop and associated parking bay at Westfield, Reap Lane, Portland, Dorset (SY68287063). No features, deposits or finds of archaeological significance were identified.

INTRODUCTION

Terrain Archaeology was commissioned by Mr. J. Hinde to undertake a programme of archaeological observations and recording during the excavation of foundation trenches for a new chicken shed and workshop, with associated parking, on land at Westfield, Reap Lane, Southwell, Portland (Planning Application No. 007614/FUL).

The site lies immediately west of Reap Lane at Ordnance Survey NGR SY68287063, within a small field, which has recently been used as allotments and for rearing of poultry (Figures 1-2). Ground within the site lies at approximately 68 m above Ordnance Datum, and slopes gently from northwest to southeast. Parts of the site have previously been built up using dumps of soil containing stone and concrete fragments. The underlying geology comprises Lower Purbeck beds (GSGBEW 1976).

An archaeological evaluation, as defined by the Institute for Archaeologists *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (1994, as revised) is "a limited programme of intrusive fieldwork, which determines the presence, or absence of archaeological features, structures, deposits, artefacts or ecofacts within a specified area or site. If such archaeological remains are present, field evaluation defines their character, extent, quality and preservation, and enables an assessment of their worth in a local, regional, national or international context, as appropriate."

The fieldwork was carried out on 19th March 2009 by Mike Trevarthen.

Terrain Archaeology would like to acknowledge the help and cooperation of the following during this project: Mr. J. Hinde (the client) and Mr. S. Wallis (Senior Archaeologist, Dorset County Council).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The earliest clear evidence for human activity in the area dates from the Mesolithic period (c. 8000-4000 BC). A sparse scatter of possibly Mesolithic worked chert was found on the northern slopes of Sweet Hill, some 800 m SSE of the site (Terrain Archaeology 1999) and an important Mesolithic occupation site with associated shell middens has been excavated at Culverwell, just over 1km to the south (Palmer 1999).

Important evidence of Neolithic (4000-3700) occupation has also been found by Terrain Archaeology on the northern slopes of Sweet Hill, where the remains of a rectangular house with an associated pit containing burnt hazelnut shells and grain have been excavated (Terrain Archaeology 2000a).

In the bottom of the coombe to the SSE of the site, two burnt mounds of probable Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age date have been excavated by Terrain Archaeology (2000b), and further Bronze Age evidence has been recorded at Suckthumb quarry, northeast of Southwell (RCHME 1970, 450).

Iron Age and Romano-British occupation appears to be centred on nearby Avalanche Road and 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 c. 0.7km to the south, along Sweet Hill road (RCHME 1970, 608). A scatter of Roman pottery has also been found along this road. Iron Age and Roman pottery have been found redeposited with modern material c.0.4km to the NNW, during recent redevelopment works at Grangecroft Road, Weston (Terrain Archaeology 2007).

In medieval and post-medieval periods, the site lay within the open fields of Portland in Great West Field (RCHME 1970, 258-9). Locally, there is some evidence for medieval occupation in Southwell: A scatter of medieval pottery (mainly 12th to 14th century) and a single rubbish pit were found during a watching brief in 1996 (Brading 1996) and additional occupation evidence comes from the junction of Sweet Hill Road and Sweet Hill Lane, where excavation of a sewer trench disturbed a limpet shell midden containing 12th or early 13th century pottery (Farrar 1951). At the upper end of Sweet Hill Road, another limpet shell midden, also bearing 12th and early 13th century pottery was discovered during construction of the access road to the former Admiralty Underwater Weapons Establishment complex (Farrar 1950). Pottery of 14th or 15th century date was discovered during construction of two houses at the western end of the triangular green at Southwell (Farrar 1962).

Immediately north of the site, and now marked by a rough trackway, a c. 0.75m – 1m high rise in ground-level to the adjacent field may indicate the presence of an agricultural lynchet, most likely to have developed along a longstanding medieval land- boundary.

A rapid scan of the historic maps for the area shows no evidence for habitation on the site, other than a small structure, of 20th century date, sited in approximately the same position as the present development, which was demolished in recent years.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The archaeological works aimed to observe and record any/all archaeologically significant features and deposits revealed during the groundworks to an appropriate professional standard.

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

METHODS

No brief or written scheme of investigation was issued for the project, but all works were undertaken in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists (formerly the Institute of Field Archaeologists) Code of Conduct and Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs.

The initial stage of groundworks comprised mechanical stripping of the approximate building footprint, with removal of up to 0.30 m of redeposited rubblely topsoil/overburden at the southern end of the site. The foundations were then laid-out and excavated using a 1.5 ton tracked excavator, fitted with a 0.5 m wide toothed bucket. The foundation trench itself was some 0.5-0.6 m wide, and was excavated down to the uppermost exposure of bedrock, at depths ranging up to 0.95 m below ground level (Plate 1).

All deposits exposed in the trenches were recorded using elements of Terrain Archaeology's recording system of complementary written, drawn and photographic records. All depths recorded were below existing ground surface level (BGL).

All records have been compiled in a stable, cross-referenced and fully indexed archive in accordance with current UKIC guidelines, and the requirements of the recipient museum. It is intended to deposit the project archive with Dorset County Museum.

RESULTS

No archaeological features or finds were seen during the initial made-ground and topsoil clearance. All subsequent trenching work was subject to archaeological scrutiny. The foundation trenches were planned at 1:50 scale and two measured sections of the soil profile were drawn (1:10) on opposing corners of the building outline.

Natural Deposits

Across the site, the upper exposure of bedrock (103) was characterised by weathered tabular and sometimes slightly rubbly pale yellow-grey limestone, its surface irregularities and small fissures infilled with yellow-grey loamy clay (a basal facet of 102 – see below).

Above bedrock, ubiquitous layer 102 comprised a firm to compact deposit of light yellow- and greyish-brown very loamy calcareous clay, generally almost stoneless, but occasionally with limestone fragments at its base (Plates 3-4). This material is also probably of primarily natural derivation, representing ancient (Pleistocene and/or early Holocene) weathering and pedogenesis. Near the southwestern corner of the building, 102 was only 0.1 m thick but it became thicker to the north, and northwest, reaching a maximum of 0.4 m. In light of the sporadic recovery of Palaeolithic finds from Portland (e.g. Palmer 1967), spoil arising from 102 was periodically scanned for worked flint, but none were recovered.

Agricultural and Recent Soils

Also ubiquitous across the site, layer 101 comprised some 0.3 m of moderately firm clay-loam with sparse to occasional small limestone inclusions, and ranging in colour from mid-dark reddish brown to the south to mid-dark yellowish brown to the north. The uniformity of thickness and a moderately well-defined basal interface with underlying layer 102 suggest this represents a former (medieval and/or post-medieval) ploughsoil.

Above 101, recent ploughsoil/topsoil 100 was a dark greyish-brown humic clay-loam, much disturbed/reworked, rubbly, and (to the south) augmented by potentially recently dumped soils containing common limestone, concrete fragments, clinker, glass etc. At the southern end of the site, this deposit was 0.4 m thick, but at its northern end only a c. 50 mm smear of topsoil was seen.

Finds

All finds from the site were of modern/recent date: none were retained.

CONCLUSIONS

No features, deposits or finds of archaeological significance were discovered during the watching brief. The absence of archaeological remains suggests the site lay at some distance from past foci of human occupation. Documentary/cartographic evidence, along with the presence of a possible

lynchet terrace immediately to the north of the site, all suggests the site has lain within agricultural land at least since medieval times.

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Figure 1: Site location map

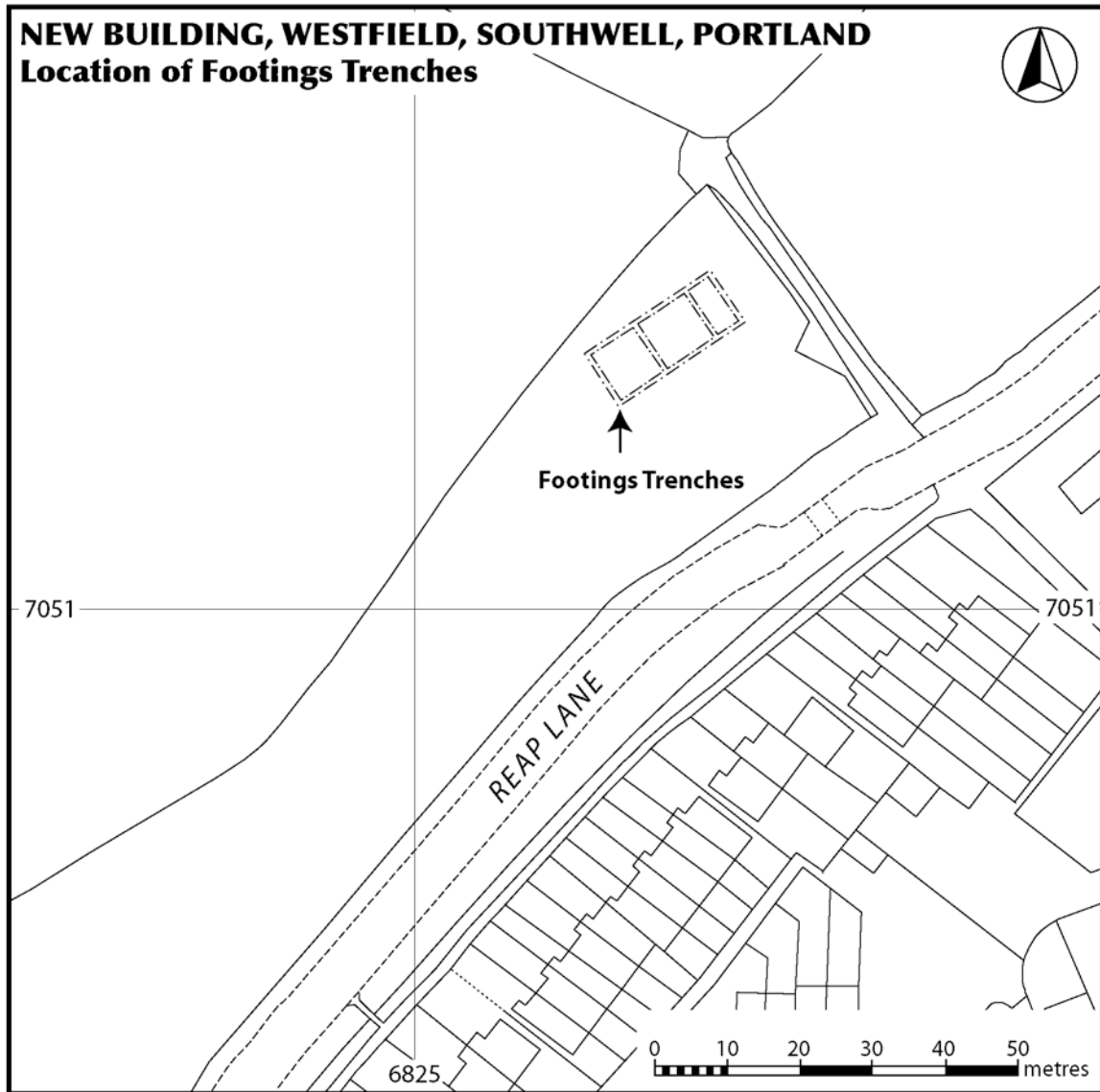


Figure 2: Location of Footings Trenches.



Plate 1: View of site during excavation of footings trenches, viewed from south.



Plate 2: Southwest end of site with stone field wall behind.



Plate 3: Detail of stratigraphy at the south end of the site.



Plate 4: Detail of stratigraphy at the north end of the site.