

LORRY PARK, ROM VALLEY WAY, ROMFORD

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESKTOP STUDY

TQ 5150 8790

Barrels being swept down through Oldchurch on the flooded River Rom, 1888.

By Jo Udall

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Project Manager - Mark Turner

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Draft geoenvironmental ground investigation report (extract)

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Newham Museum Services was commissioned by Boots Properties Plc to carry out a Desktop Archaeological Assessment of the Lorry Park, Rom Valley Way, Romford in support of a planning application.

1.2 The site is situated on the east side of Rom Valley Way, Romford, and covers an area approximately 92m north/south by 53m east/west. It is owned by Havering Borough Council, and is currently occupied by a lorry park (Appendix 1, Fig. 1b).

1.3 The intended development is a retail store with associated car parking (See Appendix 2, Fig. 6).

1.4 The site is located in an Archaeological Priority Zone, the historic town centre of Romford, described in the London Borough of Havering's Unitary Development Plan.

1.5 This study has been produced within the guidelines detailed in the English Heritage document Model Brief for an Archaeological Desktop Assessment: London Region Archaeological Guidance Paper 1 (December 1993).

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Situated on the Roman Road from London to Colchester, Romford has been identified with Durolitum (VCH 3:24; Fuentes, p. 20), a stopping-place described in the Antonine Itinerary, a third-century Roman road-book, as being 16 Roman miles from Chelmsford, and fifteen from London (Fulcher, p. 12). The name seems to mean 'the fort by the ford', but neither its location, nor the exact line of the Roman road through Romford, has yet been identified.

2.2 The first reference to Romford (probable meaning, 'wide ford') is in 1153-54. The focal point of early Romford seems to have been about half a mile south of the present town centre: the Chapel of St Andrew, mentioned in 1177, stood on the east side of the River Rom on the corner of South Street and Oldchurch Road (VCH, 7:56) (see Appendix 3) to the north-east of the lorry park site. It was attached to Hornchurch Priory, and Romford remained part of the parish of Hornchurch until the nineteenth century (VCH, 7:82). In 1236, during the reign of Henry III, there was an attempt to establish a graveyard there, but this did not succeed, and by 1410 the chapel may have fallen out of use, as one dedicated to Edward the Confessor was built further north, in the market place. The town's weekly market dates from 1247, and seems to mark the beginning of Romford's expansion along the line of the London to Colchester road (VCH, 7:56). It has also been suggested that flooding of lower lying areas may have necessitated the move north (Weinreb and Hibbert). A serious flood affecting the Oldchurch area occurred in 1888 (Evans, illustr. no. 117: see cover of this report).

2.3 The strong possibility that an earlier settlement had existed south of Romford town centre is suggested by six seventeenth-century field names in the area to the west of the river and south of Oldchurch Road, more recently known as Oldchurch Park

(see Fig. 2a: the map was drawn looking south, and is here reproduced upside down). The names Great Ruings, Lower Ruings, Three Little Ruings and Ruin Meadow have been taken to indicate that a substantial area of demolished or decaying structures had once been visible (VCH, 7:56).

2.4 Masonry was rarely used in Essex between the 5th and the 15th century for domestic buildings (VCH, 7:56), which were constructed mainly from organic materials which would degrade quite quickly, and would be unlikely to stand as ruins for very long, particularly as large timbers would probably be reused. If the more durable brick or stone was the fabric of the supposed ruins, two possibilities suggest themselves: high status medieval structures (eg a church or other large buildings), or, Roman remains. The matter is far from conclusive. Powell writes in the VCH (7:56):

Twelfth-century Romford may have stood west of St Andrew's Chapel, amid or beside the ruins of a Roman town; but the Oldchurch site has not been excavated, and no Roman or medieval remains, apart from the chapel, have been recorded there.

2.5 The word 'Ruings' is perhaps worthy of comment. According to the Oxford English Dictionary it is not known as a variant spelling of 'ruins' in the seventeenth century, or at any other time. The word could be a variant of 'rowen', defined as 'the second growth or crop of grass or hay in a season'. Variant spellings at different periods include 'ryweyn', 'rowins' and 'rowings'. Powell's transcription of all four occurrences on the 1696 map as 'ruins' may be misleading. However, the field in which the lorry park site is situated is called 'Ruin' Meadow.

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 The site lies on a gravel terrace of the River Thames known as the Hackney Gravels (previously Taplow Gravels; NB new designation on 1996 Geological Survey map).

3.2 The gravel terraces of the River Thames are known to have attracted prehistoric settlement throughout the Thames Basin. A 500 metre radius search of the Greater London Sites and Monuments Record (see Appendix 3) revealed that a Neolithic polished stone axe was found in Oldchurch Park some time before 1919, and another stone axe in Oldchurch Road (find-spot uncertain).

3.3 No Roman finds have been recorded within the 500m radius search area. In other parts of Romford, to the north and east respectively, an early Roman burial group has been found near the Western Ringroad roundabout, east of Cottons Park (P. Greenwood, pers comm), and Roman pottery at the Royal Liberty School, Brentwood Road (SMR).

3.4 The site of the medieval chapel of St Andrew is marked on the west side of the River Rom on a map of 1870-5 (Fig. 2b), but is described as being on the east bank by Powell in the VCH (7:56). In neither place have any visible remains yet been recorded. Medieval sites in the immediate area include the Crown Public House

(now rebuilt), and Havering Spring, a thirteenth-century well, both near Roneo Corner (Appendix 3).

3.5 The 'Ruings' field system shown on the Steward's Manor Estate Plan of 1696 (Fig. 2a) has been largely preserved in property boundaries and pathways (see Figs 2b & 2c) despite gravel extraction from Oldchurch Park, west of the Rom Valley Way, in the 1930s or 40s. The field named 'Ruin Meadow' is the area of the lorry park site. Its antiquity is suggested by the fact that it continues on the other side of the river (Fig. 2a). It must be supposed that the river had been diverted, perhaps canalised, from its previous course. Whichever side of the river the Chapel of St Andrew was located, this map indicates that the area closest to the road and bridge was empty of field boundaries and might have contained buildings at some time before 1696.

4. GEOTECHNICAL INVESTIGATIONS

4.1 A geotechnical investigation was undertaken at the site by Ernest Green Environmental Contracting on behalf of Boots Properties PLC (Appendix 4, extract). The draft report gave geotechnical data from 6 boreholes and 7 trial pits. These have been plotted using 'Surfer' Surface Mapping System (software programme), and are included in Appendix 2, Figs. 3-5; heights are given in metres AOD, and the current ground surface is c.11.50m AOD. The visual information is necessarily approximate given the wide spacing of the samples (see Fig. 6).

4.2 The geology of the site was found to be a sequence of Made Ground overlying Taplow Gravels with London Clay at depth. Alluvial deposits were found above the Gravels in Boreholes 1, 2, 3 & 5, and in Trial Pits 1, 4, 5, 6 & 7. In Borehole 2, no gravel was found, and the alluvium was much thicker and rested directly on the London Clay. This was taken to represent a river overflow deposit or buried channel. Other deposits where alluvium was not present include sand above the gravel in BH6, and a clayey silt matrix at the base of rubble in TP3.

4.3 Ground water was encountered at depths between 1.60m and 3.00m in TP1, 3, 4 and 5, and at depths between 3.50m and 4.40m in BH2, 5 and 6. On a later visit, groundwater was detected in all the boreholes at depths between 1.73m and 1.93m below ground level.

4.4 The alluvium generally on the site is described as:

soft to firm, but occasionally soft, brown, grey, and greenish grey silt and clay with variable proportions of sand and gravel. Locally decomposing organic debris, generally leaf and reed matter was observed with an associated organic odour. The upper surface of the alluvium is variable due to changes in Made Ground thickness. The presence of further deep and substantial thicknesses of Alluvium, as encountered at BH2, across the site cannot be discounted (Appendix 4, 4.5.1).

4.5 The depth of the alluvium varies from 1.6m to 2.8m below ground level and is up to 1.1m in thickness. The deeper alluvium in Borehole 2 lies from 1.4 to 4.2m below ground level.

4.6 Archaeological interest is likely to be in the alluvium, and the gravel surface which it seals.

5. THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

5.1 The greater part of the site will be developed as a retail store, the remaining ground becoming an associated car park (See Appendix 2, Fig. 6 for footprint of building).

5.2 The geotechnical report stresses the variability of the ground conditions, including the presence of loose fill, soft alluvium and water bearing gravels. It recommends obtaining the advice of specialist foundation contractors, but suggests bored auger or continuous flight auger cast in-situ piles' as a possible solution to the problem. The piles would be 450mm in diameter, and 15m deep. It is considered impractical to use pad foundation as these would need to be at least 4m deep (Appendix 4, 5.2).

5.3 The variability of the geology would also preclude the use of ground bearing floor slabs, and specialist advice is recommended. The report suggests either ground improvement or the use of suspended floor slabs (Appendix 4, 5.3). Such processes could involve the insertion of stone columns, or bulk removal of underlying layers to an unspecified depth.

5.4 No building specification is currently available, but it is evident that piling and/or other intrusive methods will necessarily be used to establish viable foundations on this site. The density of any proposed piling scheme is currently unknown.

6. ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

6.1 The archaeological interest of the site lies in:

(a) the proximity of the site to St Andrews Chapel, the presumed focal point of early medieval Romford.

(b) the 'Ruin Meadow' designation, with the open possibility that the area was the site of an earlier settlement.

(c) the interest in Romford as a possible site for the Roman 'Durolitum'.

(d) its position on a gravel terrace, near a river. This would constitute an ideal location for prehistoric settlement. Neolithic finds have been made in the area, and there is the potential here for a prehistoric site sealed by alluvium.

(e) the geoenvironmental evidence. It is impossible to tell whether the alluvium, as described, is ancient or modern, but it has the potential to produce buried land surfaces and valuable environmental material. It may also indicate the presence of an old river channel to the north-west of the site. Evidence of Bronze Age exploitation of riverine and estuarine habitats has been found in peat and alluvial deposits during Newham Museum Service excavations along the Roding (Barking), Thames (Beckton) and Ingrebourne (Rainham) rivers.

7. IMPACT OF THE DEVELOPMENT

7.1 The impact of the development on potential archaeological remains is likely to be extremely damaging, whether piling, pad foundations or ground improvement techniques are used. The report specifies the need to remove, or pile deeply through, the alluvial deposits and other 'soft' areas. These are the areas of particular interest to archaeology.

7.2 The site also has the potential to contain waterlogged remains the survival of which could be put in jeopardy by changes in groundwater level caused by piling and other excavation techniques (Appendix 4, 4.5.2).

8. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

8.1 The archaeological potential of the lorry park site cannot be fully determined from the information currently available. Further work, in the form of field evaluation, would be needed to ascertain the nature and extent of any archaeological survival.

8.2 The level of ground water, and the possibility of contamination (as raised in the geoenvironmental report) would need to be taken into consideration when planning archaeological work.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 It is recommended that an archaeological evaluation should take place to assess the date, nature and extent of archaeological survival on the site. This should probably take the form of at least two evaluation trenches, one of which should be located to ascertain the nature of the possible channel suggested by BH2.

10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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11. BIBLIOGRAPHY

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN TEXT AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

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VCH - Victoria County History Vol III (Hull), Vol VII (Powell)

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APPENDIX 1 - MAPS

Figure 1, a) Area location
 b) Site location

Figure 2, Map sequence showing area development (various scales):
 a) Stewards Manor Estate Plan, 1696
 b) Ordnance Survey, 1870-75
 c) Ordnance Survey, 1967

APPENDIX 2

Surfer plots:

Fig. 3 Profile - alluvium

Fig. 4 Profile - gravel

Fig. 5 Composite profile

Plan:

Fig. 6 Borehole and trial pit location plan

APPENDIX 3

Sites and Monuments Record

The records below are located on Figure 7 below

1. 060136 Ruing complex
2. 06029 polished flint axe (Oldchurch Park; find spot uncertain)
3. 060301 The Crown public house (rebuilt)
4. 060028 polished greenstone axe (find spot uncertain)
5. 061133 Havering Spring
6. 060164 flint axe “possibly same as 060029” see (2) above (Oldchurch Road; find spot uncertain)
7. 060134 St Andrews Chapel (site of)

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