

FORMER BLACKMORE PARK INDUSTRIAL  
ESTATE,  
MALVERN, WORCESTERSHIRE –  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HERITAGE  
STATEMENT



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# Former Blackmore Park Industrial Estate, Malvern, Worcestershire – archaeological and heritage statement

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## 1 Summary

*The present report provides an overview of the current archaeological potential and historic value of the Blackmore Park Industrial Estate as supporting evidence for a forthcoming planning application for redevelopment. The site (originally within Malvern Chase and developed as a medieval deer-park subsequently occupied by the Hornyold family) was occupied by a “temporary” wartime military hospital in 1942, and this operated as a US Army hospital until 1946. After the end of hostilities parts of the hospital served as prisoner of war camp, temporary housing and a military depot, eventually becoming an industrial estate in the late 1970s which remained operational until c2009. Buildings had fallen derelict, been abandoned and many demolished even before 1969, this decay continued during the life of the industrial estate, and since closure extensive vandalism and theft resulted in the demolition of the remaining buildings for safety reasons. The site has now been completely cleared, though a couple of peripheral buildings in the administrative area and the two main water towers survive to the west of the present study area. An archaeological building recording survey of the 44 remaining hospital buildings (out of 60 originally built) was undertaken in 2004-2005 by Mike Napthan Archaeology prior to a previous planning application, and this forms the principal record of the buildings. Unfortunately no formal record was made of the 175 other buildings which originally served as staff accommodation, service and administrative functions and which had almost all gone by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Research into the history of the site following building recording also contributed to publication of a comprehensive history of the site by Fran and Martin Collins (Blackmore Park in World War Two, Brewin Books 2007)*

*The site lies within the parkland of the medieval Blackmore Park, but not on the park boundaries, so that it is an unlikely location for any substantial deer-management features. As the area lies within Malvern Chase which was certainly heavily forested from the Norman period onwards there is a paucity of evidence for any occupation of the area prior to the late 16<sup>th</sup> Century when the process of disafforestation started. The area is poorly drained despite a thin gravelly cap over the underlying clays, and not well suited for cultivation. The nearest farmstead (Bower Farm) lay one field to the north west of the present site. To the south of the site (in separate ownership) there was a mill-pond of possibly medieval origins, but the mill site itself lay some distance from the present study area.*

*Early mapping indicates that the site was open ground (parkland with scattered trees) through the post-medieval period and remained so until circa 1942 when construction of the military hospital. Construction techniques at this period would have involved the use of bull-dozers to clear and level the site, and a number of drainage channels and pipes were laid prior to the*

*erection of buildings, which were predominantly of single storey on shallow concrete rafts laid on the underlying gravelly subsoil. The boiler house in the centre of the hospital was exceptional in having semi basements and being of two storey height. A sewerage plant was built to the south of the current site to serve the camp. The construction of the hospital (with its roads and concrete walkways) undoubtedly impacted on any archaeologically significant deposits, which if present would have been shallow and vestigial. Subsequent use and demolition of the site has left it very disturbed and with widespread incorporation of rubble and debris into the remaining subsoil. It would appear that now the buildings of interest have been removed the site has practically nil archaeological potential.*

*The historical importance of the site lay in the former military hospital buildings, which until 2006-7 remained as a poignant monument to the tens of thousands of injured troops that passed through the facility 1943-46. The site has now been stripped of almost every vestige of standing remains, and only the nearby water-towers serve as a memorial.*

## 2 **Introduction**

- 2.1 The present document seeks to summarize the archaeological potential and historical significance of the former US military hospital site (and subsequent industrial estate) at Blackmore Park near Malvern (SO 798 435). The project is being undertaken on behalf of the developer ESP Ltd through their Agent Philip Oakley Commercial Property Services (the Client) who are preparing a planning application.
- 2.2 This report represents a summary of the findings of the previous (2005) building recording project (Napthan 2005; WSM 27392) and subsequent research by Martin and Fran Collins who corresponded in depth with the present author in researching their 2007 book on Blackmore Park (see bibliography)

## 3 **Aims**

- 3.1 The purpose of an archaeological assessment is summarize information about the historical and archaeological resource within a given area or site. These aims were achieved through pursuit of the following objectives:
  - i) to define and identify the extent form and function of the buildings previously on site, and date these where possible;
  - ii) to attempt to determine the likely nature of the building sequence and recover as much information as possible about the spatial patterning of structures formerly present on the site;
  - iii) to determine the likely impact of the development on the archaeological resource.

## 4 **Methodology**

- 4.1 A site visit and brief photographic record was made at the site on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015. The present report was drawn up on the basis of research initially undertaken by the present author in 2005 augmented with additional material resulting from the further research by Martin and Fran Collins. As part of the previous project the present author contacted veterans in the US for their memories of the hospital (US Army veteran S/Sgt Daniel B Lenox and former Sgt and Mrs Charles Bentley - all former US medical staff at the 93<sup>rd</sup> GH), and further contacts with veterans by Martin and Fran Collins have produced a number of accounts since published in Collins 2007. The primary sources quoted in Napthan 2005 and Collins 2007 are not repeated here.

## 5 Archaeological background

- 5.1 The deer-park at Blackmore was created circa 1349, within the Royal hunting ground of Malvern Chase (VCH II), and little else is known about the archaeological history of the area. An irregular enclosure cropmark of uncertain, probably medieval, date WSM11387 is known from an aerial photograph (WHEAS collection) to have lain under the southern corner of the camp, just outside the present development area. Thomas Hornyold was descended from Edward III and the house remained in the Hornyold family until the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The family were prominent Catholics. The main house is believed to have been largely 18<sup>th</sup> Century, but may have enclosed an earlier core. It was demolished prior to construction of the WW2 military hospital, but the present approach to the site follows the line of the late 19<sup>th</sup> C drive to the house. The site of the hospital was largely level parkland, scattered with specimen trees, and a gentle slope down to the south (Figs 1 and 2). No earlier buildings were present in the vicinity, the nearest farmstead being one field to the north of the driveway.
- 5.2 The construction of the camp (known as Hospital Plant No 4172 or Blackmore Park Site One), began on 6<sup>th</sup> October 1942, and was completed on 30<sup>th</sup> July 1943 with a design capacity of 1000 beds. The main contractors were The Demolition and Construction Company, supervised by Ministry of Works architects and after hand-over on 19<sup>th</sup> August 1943, works were managed by the Royal Engineers. Medical staff arrived in September 1943. A further hospital (Blackmore Site Two, Hospital Plant 4173) was built to the north east, but lies outside the scope of this report. Work on fitting out the hospital was not completed on time and some construction work (including laying the pitchmastic floors) was not completed until September. The fitting out and setting up of the hospital was essentially completed for the admission of the first patient on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1943. By February 1944 the thousand bed hospital was over-full and patients were accommodated in additional “ward-tents” (19<sup>th</sup> General Hospital Archives, quoted in Collins 2007 4-10).
- 5.3 The 93rd General hospital occupied Blackmore Park from 14<sup>th</sup> May 1944, replacing the 19<sup>th</sup> General Hospital. In June 1944 the hospital was expanded by the addition of ward-tent extensions erected on concrete bases at the ends of 25 of the existing 35 wards. This expanded patient capacity to 1459, and some additional use of other rooms and bunk beds raised capacity to 1609 beds by December 1944. In July 1945 the hospital was closed. The site was briefly then used as a German POW camp (Camp No. 689), then from 1946-9 by the Pioneer Corps as a training camp. The Royal Electrical Mechanical Engineers (REME) occupied the site until 1956 after which the site became disused. A gang of “travellers” occupied and badly damaged many of the buildings in the late 1960s-70s whilst it was in the ownership of the County Council. In a bizarre deal (more in keeping with modern political correctness) the “travellers” were rewarded with a new purpose built facility off the entrance drive. The hospital site was then acquired in the late 1970s by a local farmer Gerald Bowness as potentially agricultural land, but the extent of the concrete bases and paths made this impracticable, so he retained and repaired the salvageable buildings to form an industrial estate and demolished the remainder. Many of the concrete bases and covered walkways remained amongst scrubby paddocks and small heaps of debris. The ward blocks, x-ray block, kitchen block and fire-station amongst others were taken over as storage and industrial units, a riding school with ménage was also rather incongruously present for many years amongst the motor repair shops, plastic window manufacturers and used tyre dealers.
- 5.4 The western part of the site was cleared gradually in 2007-2010, but the eastern buildings remained until 2014. The site has now been entirely cleared, leaving only a few mature trees and the remains of the three principal roadways as location markers for the former buildings. The remaining building fabric has been crushed and used to level up the depressions left by grubbing out of the floor slabs and foundations of the larger buildings. Photographs taken of the site in 2005 may be compared with Feb 2015 photographs, showing the few remaining trees and transmission poles that remain as recognizable landmarks (Figs 3 and 4). A few of the concrete and steel pipe support blocks from the wartime hot water heating system remain scattered around the site, but little other recognizable fabric remains from the 1940s other than the access

chambers for a culverted streamlet. Little topsoil remains on the site, which is predominantly brick and concrete rubble directly overlying the natural gravelly subsoil.

## 6 Discussion

- 6.1 Early mapping indicates that the site was open ground (parkland with scattered trees) through the post-medieval period and remained so until circa 1942 when construction of the military hospital. Construction techniques at this period would have involved the use of bull-dozers to clear and level the site, and a number of drainage channels and pipes were laid prior to the erection of buildings, which were predominantly of single storey on shallow concrete rafts laid on the underlying gravelly subsoil. The boiler house in the centre of the hospital was exceptional in having semi basements and being of two storey height. A sewerage plant was built to the south of the current site to serve the camp. The construction of the hospital (with its roads and concrete walkways) undoubtedly impacted on any archaeologically significant deposits, which if present would have been shallow and vestigial. Subsequent use and demolition of the site has left it very disturbed and with widespread incorporation of rubble and debris into the remaining subsoil. It would appear that now the buildings of interest have been removed the site has practically nil archaeological potential. Whilst the site has historic links taking it back to the 12<sup>th</sup> Century, the physical evidence of the enforestation and subsequent enparkment were lost by 1943 due to the development of the hospital complex (Blackmore Sites One and Two extended to nearly a square mile).
- 6.2 The particular importance of this site lies in its wartime importance as a major treatment centre for wounded and sick troops from the battlefields of Europe. The site was strategically important in casualty clearance and rehabilitation of troops for return to the front line or secondary roles. The maximum capacity of the two Blackmore hospitals was just under 3000 beds (for comparison currently the NHS provides 3 beds per thousand head of population!). The figures for Blackmore One are not individually available, but by December 1944 the 12<sup>th</sup> Hospital Group at Malvern had overall treated 48,936 casualties in 13 months (Collins 2007) – the total by the time the hospitals closed must therefore have approached 100,000. Surprisingly few patients died at the hospital – eight in 1944 and just two in 1945, but this reflects the types of injury treated at what was a specialist unit at a substantial distance from the front – many patients died enroute.
- 6.3 The site has been subsequently deeply disturbed by removal of the extensive hospital buildings. There is little remaining above or below ground of the former hospital within the present site boundaries, and little purpose would be served in attempting to excavate the very fragmented remains of structures that were recorded in some detail in 2005 (Napthan 2005; WSM 27392) The buildings recorded in 2005 all consisted of variations on four basic building types. The vast majority of buildings were of brick skin lined with hollow terracotta blocks, the 17 concrete framed ward blocks were the second most frequent type (albeit that 9 of these survived only as concrete bases). Six buildings were of traditional brick construction, and all but one were small lavatory blocks, storage huts etc. The last building X17 was a sole survivor of the Quonset huts that were generally used for staff accommodation. It was probably the only Quonset hut in this area of the hospital, was almost certainly the guard house. These structures, though very durable, have limited secondary use and very rarely survive on military sites in the county.
- 6.4 Very few 1940s US military hospital sites in the region survived in such a relatively complete condition beyond the millenium, and Blackmore Site One was certainly the last in the county of Worcestershire, and it is regrettable that the opportunity was missed to retain the best preserved example of the standing buildings when their significance was recognized in 2005. These sites are of exceptional historic importance as relics of the war against Germany, and as a memorial of the scale of the casualties involved. To reflect the past historic value of the site it would be appropriate for some form of memorial and interpretation board to be incorporated in the new development as a permanent marker of what was once a crucial element of the preparations for

D-Day.

## 7 **Bibliography**

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## 9 **Acknowledgements**

The project was commissioned by Philip Oakley, and thanks are due to him for also facilitating access to the site.

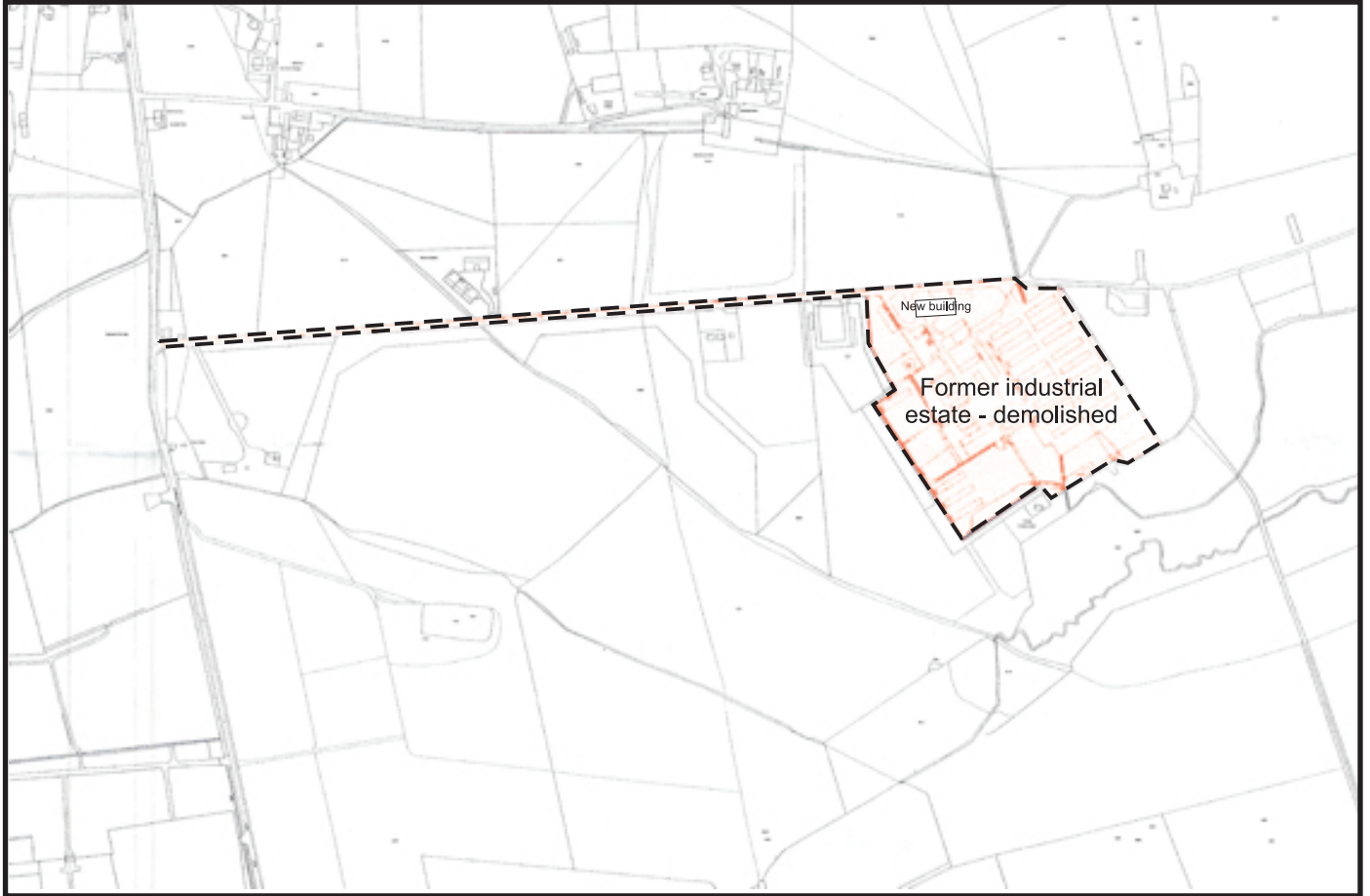


Figure 1: Location plan Blackmore Park - site in outline



Figure 2: “Old Series” Ordnance Survey mapping (composite of Sheets 55 and 43) published 1831-2, showing location of study area outlined in red - the area was then open fields divided by a small north-south stream (culverted in 1943 and running along the western side of “Walkway 1” - see Napthan, 2005)





2005 Surgical Ward "1B" facing south



Similar view February 2015



2005 "Walkway 1" between surgical wards view facing south-east



Similar view February 2015

Figure 3: Comparative images 2005 and 2015



2005 - Ward "6B" viewed from west



Similar viewpoint February 2015



2005 - view from northern corner of "X2" facing north-west (boiler house "X4") is the taller block beyond figure



View from former location of Boiler House "X4", facing NW, February 2015