MoDEL RAF BENTLEY PRIORY,
LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
INTERIM REPORT

1 ABSTRACT

1.1 *The following report details the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken by AOC Archaeology between 20th and 26th February 2008 at RAF Bentley Priory in the London Borough of Harrow*

The watching brief was carried out on the excavation of 10 geotechnical trial pits and three soak away test pits by Soil Mechanics. The trial pits each measured approximately 4.00m x 0.60m x 4.00m deep.

Natural deposits of either London Clay or Stanmore Gravels were identified in all trial pits. No archaeological remains were observed on site.

2 INTRODUCTION

SITE LOCATION

2.1 The site is centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) TQ 15453 93298 (Fig 2), and is two miles north-west of Stanmore town centre. At present the site is utilised as a non-flying Royal Air Force Station- although it was famous as the headquarters of Fighter Command during World War II. It is now used as an administrative, training and storage facility.

2.2 The site investigation has been commissioned by Halcrow Yolles on behalf of VSM Estates LTD in relation to their development proposals for the site.

DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

2.3 The proposed development involves the construction of new residential houses in six discrete areas of the site. These will consist of a mix of 1, 2, and 3 storey buildings.

2.4 Two buildings will be retained and converted for residential use; this will include the Grade II listed mansion designed by Sir John Soane.

2.5 There will also be a programme of landscaping and tree planting on the site.

PLANNING BACKGROUND

2.6 The site is in the pre-application stages of development.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

3.1 The British Geological Survey Map (BGS) sheet 256 indicates that the site lies on Stanmore Gravels overlying London Clay.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The following background information is drawn from the Specification for Archaeological Element of the Site Investigation (Halcrow Yolles 2007).

3.2 There have been two recent minor archaeological investigations within the estate. In 1992, evaluation trenches [site code RBP 92] were undertaken by the Museum of London Archaeological Service (MoLAS) in which were recorded natural clay, truncated by probable 19th/20th c landscape layers which were in turn cut by bedding trenches, possibly associated with Glentham House.

3.3 In 1995 Oxford Archaeology carried out a geophysical survey on behalf of Defence Estates. Two areas were surveyed, one over a series of 18th-19th century brick cisterns on the west side of the site, the other over the purported 18th century Sir John Soane-designed music room attached to the north side of the present officers mess. The extent of the brick cisterns was successfully identified and high

amplitude anomalies of the purported music room were encountered, though they could be interpreted as landscaping features.

3.4 The location of Bentley Priory upon the highest point in the County of Middlesex means it likely that the site has archaeological potential. Indeed, both coins and cremation burials of the Roman period have been discovered within and adjacent to the RAF estate. The name 'Bentley' is itself of Anglo-Saxon origin and suggests that by at least by the late Saxon period the immediate area had an established agricultural population. The Augustinian Priory which gave its name to the estate was founded around 1170 and was dissolved on the orders of Henry VIII c. 1542/3 and was perhaps 'slighted' i.e. the roof at least is likely to have been taken off. Thereafter there was a succession of owners starting with Archbishop Cranmer in 1543, up to 1766 when the priory buildings and 329 acres of the estate were sold to James Duberley, a clothier made wealthy through supplying the army. Duberley is reported to have thrown down the remains of the old priory and had his new house erected away from the old site and on top of the hill to take advantage of the views. Much of Duberley's house was incorporated into the later Sir John Soane mansion for the Marquis of Abercorn between 1789 and 1799.

4 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

4.1 The aims of the Watching Brief were defined as being the following:

- To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the site.
- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered.
- To assess the ecofactual and environmental potential of any archaeological features and deposits.
- To record and sample excavate any archaeological remains encountered.
- To enable the archaeology advisor to the London Borough of Harrow to make an informed decision on the status of the condition on the planning permission, and any possible requirement for further work in order to satisfy that condition.

4.2 To make available to interested parties the results of the investigation in order to inform the mitigation strategy as part of the planning process.

4.3 The specific aims of the Watching Brief were to:

- Determine the presence of any remains of Roman date:
- Determine the presence of any remains of Saxon date:
- Provide details of the ground conditions and a model of the underlying geological and archaeological strata:

4.4 The final aim is to make public the results of the investigation, subject to any confidentiality restrictions.

5 METHODOLOGY

5.1 All excavations were carried out under the constant supervision and observation of an experienced archaeologist.

5.2 The watching brief was associated with the excavation of 13 geo-technical trial pits. All pits were excavated with a JCB 3CX.

5.3 The spoil heap for each pit was sieved for finds and a metal detector was used throughout.

5.4 All of the work was carried out in line with Archaeological Guidance Paper (AGP): 3, Standards and Practices in Archaeological Fieldwork (English Heritage June 1998); and IFA Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs (IFA October 1994).

5.5 The watching brief was undertaken by Leigh Savage under the overall project management of Catherine Edwards for AOC Archaeology.

6 SCOPE OF WORKS

6.1 The geotechnical investigation carried out across the site comprised trial pits (x10), cable percussion boreholes (x15) and window samples boreholes (x69). The Watching Brief was conducted upon 10 trial pits, and three soak away test pits. All pits were excavated in pre-determined locations as illustrated on Figure 2.

7 RESULTS

7.1 The earliest deposit recorded in eight trial pits was a very firm blue/grey London Clay. The deposit was encountered between 0.90m (CTP06) to 3.45m (BTP03) below ground level. As the trial pits were terminated at 4.00m, the thickness of the deposit was not established. Overlying the clay were deposits of Stanmore Gravel recorded between 0.40m (ATP01) to 3.04m (CTP01). Up to three variants of the gravels were recorded on site, typified by lenses of sand and pockets of gravels and clay throughout the strata. The gravels recorded in the trial pits located in the south-west of the site were encountered deeper than test pits located in the south-eastern area, suggesting a natural gradual slope across the site.

7.2 Sealing the Stanmore Gravels in the majority of trial pits were deposits of made ground composed of sandy silty gravels with inclusions of CBM, pottery sherds, glass and wood fragments. The exception to this were trenches BTP05, CTP01, CTP02 and CTP04 which contained deposits of buried topsoil or a sequence of subsoil overlaid by buried topsoil (Figures 3 & 4). In these instances the buried topsoil, was overlaid by a dump layer of made ground suggesting that those areas have been raised during a phase of land management.

7.3 The trial pits were covered in either topsoil and grass or concrete.

8 CONCLUSIONS

8.1 The results from the watching brief indicate that no archaeological remains were present in the areas excavated. Several of the trial pits indicate that there has been small-scale land management on site. The presence of subsoil in only three trial pits may suggest that the site has been horizontally truncated, possibly through landscaping and management.

9 FINDS

9.1 Only a small number of finds were recovered during the excavations. These were all retrieved from the made ground rather than from *in situ* features. The assemblage includes fragments of peg tile, blue and white pearlware pottery, fragments of glass, hand painted glazed tableware and fragments of leather.

9.2 The finds all date roughly to the late 19th century to early 20th century.

10 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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APPENDIX A – TRIAL PITS

AREA A

ATP01

Context	Description	Depth (dbs)
1/001	Poorly sorted gravels in a sandy matrix, ranges from orange to purpley grey. Made ground	0.00 to 0.40m
1/002	Poorly sorted orangey blue gravels in a silty clay matrix. Stanmore gravels	0.40 to 1.60m
1/003	Orange coarse sand. Stanmore gravels	1.60 to 2.40m
1/004	Orange blue clay (Langley Silt?)	2.40 to 4.00m

ATP02

Context	Description	Depth (dbs)
2/001	Topsoil and grasses	0.00 to 0.25m
2/002	Dark brown poorly sorted gravel in silt matrix, occasional roots and CBM. Made ground	0.25 to 0.65m
2/003	Blue orange clay with poorly sorted gravels. Natural Stanmore Gravels	0.65 to 1.30m
2/004	Coarse orange sand. Stanmore Gravels	1.30 to 2.10m
2/005	Orange and blue silty clay. Stanmore Gravels	2.10 to 4.00m

AREA B

BTP01

Context	Description	Depth (dbs)
1/001	Topsoil and grasses	0.00 to 0.05m
1/002	Mid grey brown sandy silty gravels, occasional charcoal and CBM. Made ground	0.05 to 0.75m
1/003	Poorly sorted orange brown gravel in sandy silt matrix. Stanmore Gravels	0.75 to 1.55m
1/004	Blue orange poorly sorted gravels in sandy silt matrix. Stanmore Gravels	1.55 to 2.55
1/004	Orange coarse sand. Stanmore Gravels	2.55 to 2.95m
1/005	Firm blue grey clay. London Clay	2.95 to 4.00m

BTP02

Context	Description	Depth (dbs)
2/001	Topsoil and grasses	0.00 to 0.05m
2/002	Poorly sorted gravels in a sandy silt matrix, frequent brick, CBM and ash. Made ground	0.05 to 1.50m

2/003	Orange blue poorly sorted gravels in sandy silt matrix. Stanmore Gravels	1.50 to 2.35m
2/004	Wet coarse yellow orange sand. Stanmore Gravels	2.35 to 4.00m

BTP03

Context	**Description**	**Depth** (dbs)
3/001	Topsoil and grasses	0.00 to 0.05m
3/002	Poorly sorted gravels in sandy matrix, frequent CBM and domestic rubbish. Made ground	0.05 to 1.90m
3/003	Buried topsoil	1.90 to 2.15m
3/004	Blue orange poorly sorted gravel in silty sand matrix	2.15 to 3.45m
3/005	Blue orange crumbly silty clay. Stanmore Gravels	3.45 to 4.00m

BTP04

Context	**Description**	**Depth** (dbs)
4/001	Topsoil and grasses	0.00 to 0.05m
4/002	Poorly sorted gravels in a sandy silt matrix, occasional CBM and ash. Made ground	0.05 to 0.45m
4/003	Poorly sorted gravels in a sandy matrix, occasional CBM. Made ground	0.45 to 2.05m
4/004	Blue and orange coarse sand. Stanmore gravels	2.05 to 2.45m
4/005	Blue orange clay. London clay	2.45 to 4.00m

BTP05

Context	**Description**	**Depth** (dbs)
5/001	Topsoil and grasses over a dump layer	0.00 to 0.30m
5/002	Light brown grey silt with domestic rubbish. Made ground	0.30 to 0.50m
5/003	Buried topsoil	0.50 to 0.70m
5/004	Mid grey brown organic silt. subsoil	0.70 to 0.90m
5/005	Orange brown poorly sorted gravel in a sandy silt matrix, occasional CBM. Made ground	0.90 to 1.30m
5/006	Yellow orange gravel in sandy matrix. Stanmore gravel	1.30 to 4.00m

AREA C

CTP01

Context	**Description**	**Depth** (dbs)
1/001	Topsoil and grasses	0.00 to 0.24m
1/002	Mid to dark brown organic silt. subsoil	0.24 to 0.64m

1/003	Poorly sorted orange brown gravels in a sandy matrix	0.64 to 3.04m
1/004	Firm and crumbly orange blue sandy clay. Stanmore gravels	3.04 to 4.00m

CTP02

Context	**Description**	**Depth** (dbs)
2/001	Topsoil and grasses	0.00 to 0.20m
2/002	Mid to dark brown organic silt. subsoil	0.20 to 0.40m
2/003	Mid brown gravely silt, occasional CBM. Made ground	0.40 to 1.00m
2/004	Yellowy orange poorly sorted gravel in a silty matrix. Stanmore gravels	1.00 to 2.20m
2/005	Orangey blue crumbly silt clay. Stanmore gravel	2.20 to 2.50m
2/006	Bluey grey very firm clay. London clay	2.50 to 4.00m

CTP03

Context	**Description**	**Depth** (dbs)
3/001	Loose grey gravel. Hard standing	0.00 to 0.05m
3/002	Blue orange firm silty clay with poorly sorted gravels. Brick earth	0.05 to 1.14m
3/003	Contaminated layer (hydro-carbons)	1.14 to 1.40m
3/004	Blue orange silty clay with poorly sorted gravels. Brick earth	1.40 to 2.00m
3/005	Blue orange firm poorly sorted gravels. London clay	2.00 to 4.00m

CTP04

Context	**Description**	**Depth** (dbs)
4/001	Loose grey gravel. Hard standing	0.00 to 0.05m
4/002	Light brown dense heavy sticky clay. Made ground	0.05 to 0.45m
4/003	Dark black loose organic, frequent roots. Buried topsoil	0.45 to 0.55m
4/004	Light brown to blue green gravel in sandy matrix. Stanmore gravel	0.55 to 3.15m
4/005	Firm blue orange clay. London clay	3.15 to 4.00m

CTP05

Context	**Description**	**Depth** (dbs)
5/001	Loose grey gravel. Hard standing	0.00 to 0.50m
5/002	Poorly sorted gravel in sandy clay matrix. Stanmore gravel	0.50 to 0.95m

5/003	Moderately firm blue and orange silty clay with clay stone.	0.95 to 4.00m

CTP06

Context	**Description**	**Depth** (dbs)
6/001	Topsoil and grasses	0.00 to 0.05m
6/002	Dense heavy clay with poorly sorted gravels, frequent domestic rubbish. Made ground	0.05 to 0.35m
6/003	Like Brickearth, poorly sorted gravels, wood fragments ash patches. Made ground	0.35 to 0.90m
6/004	Light brown sticky clay, top of clay deposit contaminated.	0.90 to 4.00m