

St Mary's Old People's Home, Vicarage Road, London Borough of Bexley

Report on an Archaeological Watching Brief and Evaluation

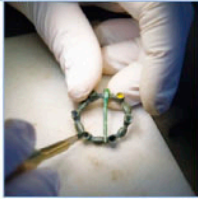
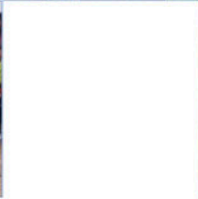
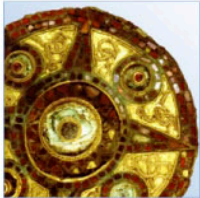
Planning Application Number: 06/14571/CAC and 06/1471/F

National Grid Reference: TQ 4979 7321

AOC Project no: 30049

Site Code: VCB 08

December 2009



ARCHAEOLOGY

HERITAGE

CONSERVATION

St Mary's Old People's Home, Vicarage Road, London Borough of Bexley

Report on an Archaeological Watching Brief and Evaluation

On Behalf of: Purelake New Homes Ltd
87-89 Springbank Road
Hither Green
London
SE13 6SS

National Grid Reference (NGR): TQ 4979 7321

AOC Project No: 30049

Prepared by: Stella Bickelmann

Illustration by: Jon Moller

Date of Attendance: 18th-22nd September 2008
10th December 2009

Date of Report: December 2009

This document has been prepared in accordance with AOC standard operating procedures.

Author: Stella Bickelmann **Date:** December 2009
Approved by: **Date:** 2009
Draft/Final Report Stage: **Date:** 2009

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Non-Technical Summary

An archaeological watching brief and evaluation was undertaken by AOC Archaeology on behalf of Purelake New Homes at the site of St Mary's Old People's Home, London Borough of Bexley between 18th September 2008 and 10th December 2009. The archaeological works comprised a watching brief on the excavation of foundation trenches during the construction phase of the new buildings in the southern area of the site and a subsequent archaeological evaluation in the form of two trial trenches in the northern part of the site. The aim was to determine the presence or absence of archaeological remains on site.

The earliest archaeological evidence on site was in form of a linear depression in the underlying terrace gravel which was filled by a layer of silty clay and a layer of gravel. This may be evidence of a palaeochannel of uncertain date. The only secure dating evidence came from the topsoil. Modern china and clay tobacco pipe fragments are indicative of the site's use since the 19th century, when the vicarage was built. There is no indication of activity on site prior to the construction of the vicarage in the early 19th century.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This document is a final report on archaeological works carried out at St Mary's Old People's Home, Vicarage Road, London Borough of Bexley between September 2008 and December 2009. It includes the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken on excavations of foundation trenches during the construction phase of the new buildings, and a subsequent archaeological evaluation which comprised the excavation of two trial trenches.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Site Location

- 2.1.1 The site is situated to the south of the village of Old Bexley, Kent and is centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) TQ 4979 7321 (Figure 1). The site is bounded by a public house and North Cray Road to the northwest, Vicarage Road to the northeast and another public house to the southeast. To the southwest is a large grassy field. The River Cray flows a short distance to the west (Figure 2).

2.2 Planning Background

- 2.2.1 The local planning authority is the London Borough of Bexley. Archaeological advice to the council is provided by the Greater London Archaeology Advisory Service (GLAAS), part of English Heritage.
- 2.2.2 The development has been granted conditional planning permission for the redevelopment of the site (Planning application No. 06/14571/CAC and 06/1471/F). This is to include demolition of the house and garage and part demolition of the extended vicarage to provide 30 new dwellings with associated parking.
- 2.2.3 The first stage in the archaeological investigation was the production of a Written Scheme of Investigation for the archaeological watching brief (AOC 2008a). This was submitted to, and approved by, the London Borough of Bexley.
- 2.2.4 Due to an anticipated lengthy hiatus in the on-site excavations, the watching brief was postponed in September 2008 and an interim report produced (AOC 2008b).
- 2.2.5 Upon recommencement of the on-site excavations the watching brief was not continued due to a breakdown in communication. Subsequent discussions with the LPA and GLAAS resulted in the agreement that two additional trial trenches be excavated to mitigate the potential damage caused by the development that went unobserved.
- 2.2.6 This report is a final report on all phases of the on-site work.

2.3 Geology and Topography

- 2.3.1 The British Geological Survey (BGS) Map 271 indicates that the site lies on flood plain gravels of the River Cray which are bounded by alluvium in the river valley to the northwest and Thanet Beds on the higher ground to the southeast. The alluvium is rich agricultural soil, and is the cause of Bexley's agricultural focus.

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Prehistoric (before AD 43)

- 3.1.1 Several Palaeolithic flakes have been found in the vicinity of Bexley, although the actual find spots are not recorded.
- 3.1.2 A number of ditches and post holes dated tentatively to the Mesolithic/Neolithic were recorded in Thanet Road 350 metres to the north of the site.

3.2 Roman (c. AD43-450)

- 3.2.1 Evidence of Roman activity has been found at 16 North Cray Road and with evidence all along the Cray Valley it is possible a Roman trackway ran along the valley (Notes by Bexley Council). Bexley and the surrounding area lie some distance outside of the main Roman settlement area of *Londinium* where the modern City of London now lies. However the Roman road Watling Street bisects the London Borough of Bexley, running east-west through the borough. This lies approximately 2km to the north of the proposed development site.

3.3 Anglo-Saxon (c. AD 451-1065)

- 3.3.1 Bexley began as a Saxon settlement, possibly as early as the 5th century. Originally called *Byxlea*, meaning 'wood or clearing where box trees grow' it is situated along the River Cray. The earliest written reference is from a charter of 814 whereby the then ruler of Kent, King Cenwulf of Mercia granted 10 ploughlands (about 100-120 acres) to archbishop Wulfred.

3.4 Medieval (c. AD 1066-1485)

- 3.4.1 By the Domesday survey of 1086 Bexley had grown to about 240 acres with a population of approximately 55 people and was still in the hands of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Domesday Survey mentions a church at the site of the present St Mary's Church and three mills, one of which was on the site of the present 'Old Mill' on the River Cray.
- 3.4.2 Through the medieval period Bexley was a small agricultural community employing the small enclosed field systems common to Kent at this time. The administrative centre of the manor of Bexley was the court lodge located to the south of the church on the site of the existing manor house. This belonged to the Archbishop of Canterbury until 1536 when it was sold to Oxford University. The town itself probably covered an area along the streets from the church to the station, surrounded by smallholdings and woodland.

3.5 Post-Medieval (c. AD 1486-modern)

- 3.5.1 Social and religious changes affected the village with land ownership changing hands with the dissolution of the monasteries, much of it passing to Oxford University in the 17th century as a gift from William Camden.
- 3.5.2 Like many small towns, especially those in close proximity to the expanding metropolis of London, Bexley changed dramatically in the latter part of the 19th century. Change began with the establishment of Bexleyheath (or 'Bexley New Town' as it was originally known) on former scrub heath land along the Canterbury Road in the early part of the century, consolidated with the establishment of the railway in 1866. The railway turned Bexley into a middle class residential district

for people working in London with the attendant construction of a new church, school and housing to meet the needs of expanding population.

3.5.3 The original vicarage for St Mary's Church was situated just to the south of the church grounds until its demolition in 1776. The 1840 tithe map shows the vicarage on the present site which mortgage documents show being rebuilt in 1875 for £1,548.

3.5.4 A map of bomb damage during the Second World War shows a number of strikes near to the southern boundary of the site but there is no suggestion that the vicarage itself was damaged. Since the 1960's the vicarage has been used as an elderly person's home which is now disused.

4. AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

4.1 The aims of the Watching Brief were to mitigate the impact of the development and preserve by record any archaeological remains impacted by the development. This applied to remains of all periods, and includes evidence of past environment

4.2 The aims of the archaeological works are defined as being:

- To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the site.
- To record evidence of building alterations as it is opened up.
- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered.
- To record and sample excavate any archaeological remains encountered.
- To assess the ecofactual and environmental potential of any archaeological features and deposits.
- To determine the extent of previous truncations of the archaeological deposits.
- To enable the archaeology advisor to the London Borough of Bexley to make an informed decision on the status of the archaeology condition and any requirement for further work.
- 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 investigation are:

- To determine the presence of any remains of Saxon or earlier date on the site.
- To determine the presence of any remains of medieval Bexley on the site.

5. STRATEGY

5.1 A unique site code for the project was obtained from the Museum of London before commencing work (**VCB 08**).

5.2 The work was carried out during landscaping on the site and excavation of foundation trenches.

5.3 The work was carried out by a team of experienced archaeologists.

5.4 The work was overseen by a Project Supervisor under the overall direction of Andy Leonard, Fieldwork Manager.

5.5 Monitoring of the archaeological works was undertaken by, Mark Stevenson of the Greater London Archaeology Advisory Service.

6. METHODOLOGY

- 6.1 The archaeological watching brief was conducted according to the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) by AOC Archaeology Group (2008). The archaeological evaluation was carried out in accordance with a plan agreed with GLAAS and to national standards and guidelines.
- 6.2 The trenches excavated during the watching brief phase were undertaken using a tracked machine with a smooth-bladed bucket 0.60m and 0.75m wide depending on the required trench width, while the evaluation trenches were machined with a smooth-bladed bucket of 1.20m width.
- 6.3 All deposits were taken down in level spits to the required trench depth. The upcast gravels and silty clays were scanned for archaeological material, and all trench sides were examined to check for features that may have been missed in plan view.
- 6.4 Records of the full sequence of all archaeological deposits were produced to the standards set out within the MoLAS Archaeological Field Manual (1994), datum levels of archaeological deposits were taken and artefacts, where present, collected for further processing and dating.

7. RESULTS

7.1 Results of Watching Brief

- 7.1.1 The earliest deposit was very compact sub-angular gravel within a silty clay matrix (1), at a depth of 1.5m below ground level. This was only seen in the deepest of the trenches. In the southwestern foundation trenches, this was seen to drop in a linear hollow 15m wide and up to 1m deep, running roughly east-west, suggesting the presence of some kind of water channel. The gravel deposit was sealed by a layer of fine, compact yellowish brown silty clay (2) typical of river silts laid down in a slow-water environment. A second layer of gravel (3) lay atop the silty clay, also likely to be water-borne, typical of deposits laid down by faster water. This was sealed by another widespread deposit of gravel (4).
- 7.1.2 The gravel sequence was sealed by a deposit of silty sandy clay (5) up to 0.50m deep, which was across the entire area observed, and is subsoil. Atop the subsoil was a layer of dark brown sandy clay-silt (6), the topsoil of the site. Occasional small fragments of china and clay tobacco pipe were seen in this topsoil, and discarded, being of low archaeological value.
- 7.1.3 No significant archaeological features or finds were identified during the watching brief.

7.2 Results of Evaluation

Trench 1

- 7.2.1 Trench 1 was located approximately 2.5m northeast of the newly built terraced houses, which occupy the north-western part of the site. The trench was roughly north-south aligned and measured 4m x 2.00m (Figure 4).

Table of stratigraphy:

Level (OD) of Top of Context	Thickness	Context	Description
14.12m	0.25m-0.50m	1001	Modern made ground
13.90m	0.20m-0.30m	1002	Horticultural / Agricultural soil
13.52m	0.45m	1003	Buried soil
13.12m	N/A	1004	Natural sands and gravels

- 7.2.2 The naturally-lain gravel was present at 13.12mOD, and was light yellowish brown sand with small, well-sorted gravel inclusions (1004). This was sealed by a layer of gravel-rich brown sandy silt (1003) 0.45m thick that contained only few charcoal inclusions. No other finds were retrieved, suggesting a relatively unworked soil.
- 7.2.3 Above this at 13.88mOD was a layer of homogenous mid to dark brown sandy silt (1002) that was between 0.20m and 0.30m thick. The layer included a moderate amount of gravel but only few charcoal and CBM fragments, suggesting a horticultural or agricultural use of this particular area, associated with the vicarage.
- 7.2.4 These deposits were sealed by a layer of between 0.25 to 0.50m thick made ground (1001) of 20th century origin, containing within it pieces of tarmac, concrete and plastic items at 14.12mOD.
- 7.2.5 The modern made ground was cut by pipe runs and cable trenches in the southern and northern limit of the trench. They were roughly oriented east-west and serve the new buildings to the southwest of Trench 1.



East-facing Section of Trench 1

Trench 2

- 7.2.6 Trench 2 was situated towards the north-centre of the site, approximately 6m south of the main building. It was roughly east-west orientated measuring 4m by 2.20m (Figure 5).

Table of stratigraphy:

Level (OD) of Top of Context	Thickness	Context	Description
14.52m	0.40-0.60m	2001	Modern made ground
14.12m	0.20-0.45m	2002	Buried made ground
13.74m	0.25m	2003	Buried soil
13.55m	N/A	2004	Natural sands and gravels

- 7.2.7 The naturally-lain gravels (2004) were present at 14.52mOD. They were again sealed by a layer of gravel-rich brown sandy silt (2003) 0.20m- 0.45m thick that contained only few charcoal inclusions.

- 7.2.8 A 0.20m- 0.40m thick layer (2002) of mid-dark brown silty sand with frequent gravel and charcoal inclusions was encountered at 14.12mOD. The deposit revealed a moderate amount of building material, such as tile and brick fragments, animal bone as well as one sherd of pottery. Although the pottery is possibly Roman or medieval in date, the building material is no earlier than medieval, probably post-medieval (Appendix B). The presence of building material suggests a demolition deposit or made-ground related to the alteration or demolition of the former vicarage that stood on the place of the present main building immediately north of the trench.
- 7.2.9 Modern made ground, associated with the current building works taking place on site, was sealing the underlying deposits at 14.52mOD. The deposit was up to 0.60m thick.
- 7.2.10 A north-south running pipe trench about 1.20m wide was truncating deposits (2001) to (2003) in the eastern area of Trench 2. It services the main building to the north.
- 7.2.11 No significant archaeological features or finds were encountered during the evaluation trenching.



South-facing Section of Trench 2

8. FINDS

- 8.1 Finds were retrieved from only one archaeological deposit (2002). These included a number of ceramic peg tiles, one piece of cattle leg bone and a single pot sherd. The dates range from the Roman to medieval, possibly post-medieval periods (Appendix B). It is not recommended that any further work is undertaken on this small assemblage.

9. DISCUSSION

- 9.1 The earliest archaeological evidence on site is in form of a linear depression in the underlying terrace gravel which is filled by a layer of silty clay and a layer of gravel. This may be evidence of a palaeochannel: an old river bed formed in the past when a river altered course to leave behind a channel that became silted. This may be an earlier channel of the River Cray, or a small tributary. No dating evidence was apparent.
- 9.2 The finds recovered from deposit (2002) in Trench 2 proved inconclusive. While the pottery sherd is thought to be either Roman or medieval fineware, the peg tiles must be of post 14th century date. The make-up and location of the deposit suggests that the deposit is a demolition layer or made-ground associated with the former vicarage immediately north of the trench. The sherd is therefore likely to be residual.

- 9.3 The only secure dating evidence came from the topsoil. Modern china and clay tobacco pipe fragments are indicative of the site's use since the 19th century, when the vicarage was built. No other finds or features were retrieved suggesting archaeological activity on site prior to the vicarage.

10. PUBLICATION

- 10.1 Given the limited results of the evaluation the project will be published as a summary in the local archaeological journal and through the OASIS project.

11. BIBLIOGRAPHY

AOC Archaeology Group Ltd 2008a: *St Mary's Old People's Home, Vicarage Road, London Borough of Bexley: A Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Evaluation.*

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Museum of London (1994 revised 2001). *Archaeological Site Manual (3rd ed).*

Figure 1 – Site Location

Figure 2 – Detailed Site Location

Figure 3 – Location of monitored building foundations and Evaluation trenches

Figure 4 – Trench 1

Figure 5 – Trench 2

Appendix A – Context Register

Context No.	Context Description	Length	Width	Depth
1001	modern made ground	2.80m	1.30m	0.25-0.40m
1002	homogeneous mid to dark sandy silt with occa charcoal, cbm fragments: garden soil	2.80m	1.30m	0.20-0.30m
1003	mid brown gravel and sand with occasional charcoal inclusions	2.80m	1.30m	0.45m
1004	natural sands and gravels	2.80m	1.30m	n/a
2001	modern made ground	4.00m	2.20m	0.40- 0.60m
2002	mid-dark brown silt sand with frequent gravel, charcoal, moderate cbm and occasional pot and bone inclusions: buried made ground	2.80m	2.20m	0.20m- 0.45m
2003	mid brown gravel and sand with occasional charcoal inclusions	2.80m	2.20m	0.25m
2004	natural sands and gravels	4.00m	2.20m	n/a

Appendix B – Finds Report

An Assessment of the Finds from a watching brief at Old People's Home, Vicarage Road, Old Bexley (VCB08)

Paul Fitz
AOC Archaeology

The Pottery

Only one sherd was recovered from context (2002). Despite being studied by specialists the sherd has proved undiagnostic and is thought to be either Roman or a medieval fineware.

Ceramic Building Material

Ceramic building material was recovered from the same context (2002), being eight pieces of peg tile with a total weight of 353 grams. The only total dimensions were the thickness of the pieces which ranged from 8-12 millimetres. No peg holes or signs of glazing were visible. These pieces do not date to earlier than the 14th century.

Animal Bone

One fragment of cattle leg bone was recovered, again from context (2002).

Recommendations

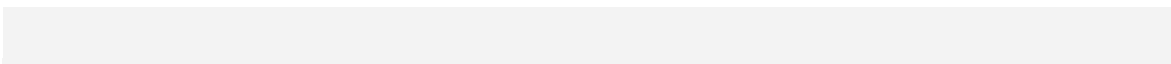
No further work is recommended on the assemblage.

Appendix C– OASIS Form

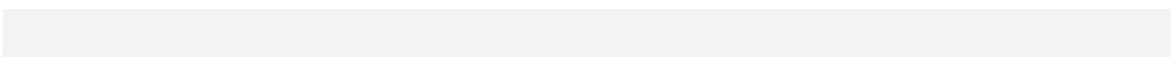
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OASIS ID: aocarcha1-69574



Project details

Project name St Marys Old Peoples Home, Bexley

Short description of the project The archaeological works undertaken on the site comprised a watching brief on the excavation of foundation trenches during the construction phase of the new buildings in the southern area of the site and a subsequent archaeological evaluation in the form of two trial trenches in the northern part of the site. The earliest archaeological evidence on site was in form of a linear depression in the underlying terrace gravel which was filled by a layer of silty clay and a layer of gravel. This may be evidence of a palaeochannel of uncertain date. The only secure dating evidence came from the topsoil. Modern china and clay tobacco pipe fragments are indicative of the sites use since the 19th century, when the vicarage was built. Finds from other deposits proved inconclusive and there is no indication of activity on site prior to the construction of the vicarage in the early 19th century.

Project dates Start: 18-10-2008 End: 10-12-2009

Previous/future work No / No

Any associated project reference codes 30049 - Contracting Unit No.

Any associated project reference codes VCB08 - Sitecode

Type of project Field evaluation

Site status None

Current Land use Residential 1 - General Residential

Monument type VICARAGE Post Medieval

Significant Finds POT Uncertain

Methods & 'Sample Trenches'
techniques

Development type Urban residential (e.g. flats, houses, etc.)

Prompt Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPG16

Position in the After full determination (eg. As a condition)
planning process

Project location

Country England

Site location GREATER LONDON BEXLEY BEXLEY St Mary's Old People's Home, Vicarage Road

Postcode DA5 2AL

Study area 200.00 Square metres

Site coordinates TQ 4979 7321 51.4375392580 0.155338467138 51 26 15 N 000 09 19 E Point

Lat/Long Datum Unknown

Height OD / Depth Min: 13.07m Max: 13.55m

Project creators

Name of AOC Archaeology Group
Organisation

Project brief English Heritage
originator

Project design originator AOC Archaeology Group

Project director/manager Andy Leonard

Project supervisor Les Capon

Type of sponsor/funding body Developer

Name of sponsor/funding body Purelake New Homes PLC

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient Museum of London-LAARC

Physical Archive ID VCB08

Physical Contents 'Ceramics'

Digital Archive recipient Museum of London-LAARC

Digital Archive ID VCB08

Digital Contents 'Stratigraphic','Ceramics'

Digital Media available 'Images vector','Images raster / digital photography','Spreadsheets','Text'

Paper Archive recipient Museum of London-LAARC

Paper Archive ID VCB08

Paper Contents 'Stratigraphic'

Paper Media 'Context sheet','Drawing','Microfilm','Plan','Report','Unpublished Text'
available

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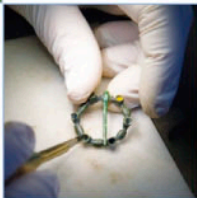
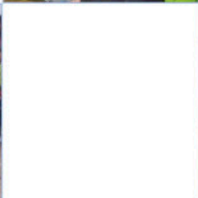
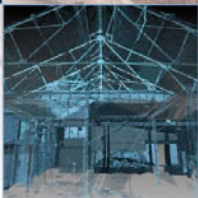
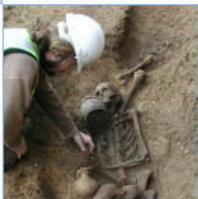
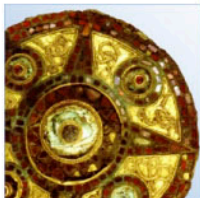
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