Archaeological
Research
Services Ltd

Alton Towers Resort, Alton, Results of an Archaeological Watching Brief.

Location of 15 test pits in the vicinity of the dismantled "Corkscrew"

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Executive Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Archaeological Research Services Ltd on behalf of Alton Towers Resort Operations Ltd during the excavation of groundworks for the foundations of a proposed new rollercoaster at Alton Towers resort. This initially entailed observation of the excavation of 15 test pits in the area of the now dismantled Corkscrew ride. Further observation of groundworks was then undertaken both in this area and the surrounding woodland to the south.

The excavations in the area of the former corkscrew ride recorded a heavily disturbed layer of rubble relating to made ground which consisted of hardcore deposited directly onto sandstone bedrock and there was no evidence of surviving archaeology or natural layers above the bedrock. Observation of further excavation in this area revealed the same stratigraphy, with modern debris and foundations of the former ride straight down onto bedrock.

Further observations were maintained in the woodland surrounding this area during the excavation of all foundation pits and larger foundation trenches. These recorded a thick layer of redeposited clay on top of an old layer of leaf mould and a thin preserved layer of natural sandy clay soil. The area was stratigraphically excavated with a toothless ditching bucket and revealed no traces of preserved archaeology.

No other significant archaeological features, deposits, buried land surfaces or small finds were located within the extent of the trenches due to the shallow depth excavated.

1. Introduction

1.1 An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Archaeological Research Services Ltd on behalf of Alton Towers Resort Operations Ltd at Alton Towers Resort. The area of ground under observation was situated on the southern edge of the resort in the area formerly occupied by the Corkscrew rollercoaster. The work had been requested by the Development Control Archaeologist for Staffordshire County Council due to the proximity of the proposed development to archaeologically sensitive areas within the Grade I registered Park and Garden.

2. Location and Geology

2.1 Alton towers is situated 1km to the north of the village of Alton 23.3km to the east of Stoke on Trent.

2.2 The solid geology of the site of Alton Towers is Millstone grit; sandstone and siltstone over Triassic sandstone inter bedded with conglomerate (BGS 1993).

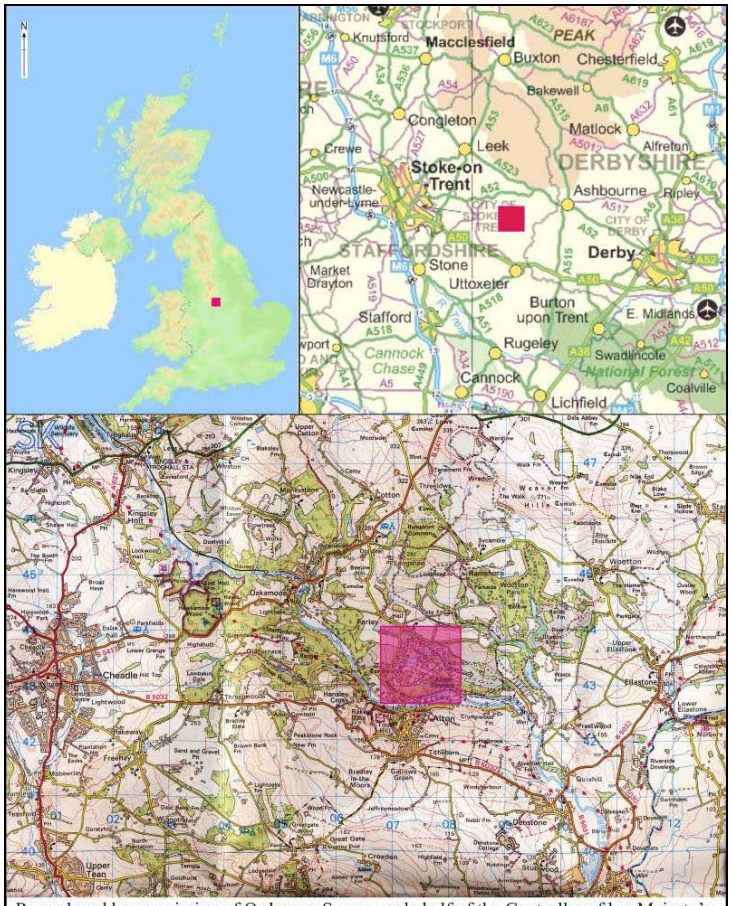

Fig. 1: Location map of Alton towers.

3. Aims of the Project

3.1 The project was an archaeological watching brief at the request of the Staffordshire County Council Development Control Archaeologist. The aim of the watching brief was to observe the ground works for a new rollercoaster development for the presence of any archaeological remains and to fully record and excavate any archaeological features encountered to allow preservation by record of any archaeological remains identified. Given the location of the development in close proximity to the prehistoric earthworks of the hill fort and the importance of the medieval and post medieval landscape in the area there was a high potential for stratified archaeological remains to be present.

4. Method Statement

4.1 The excavation was undertaken by machine and also by hand in areas where there was an indication of archaeological potential or possible service pipes. The entire process was monitored by an archaeologist from Archaeological Research Services Ltd. All the contexts were recorded on pro-forma sheets, and a context register and photo register were produced for inclusion in the archive.

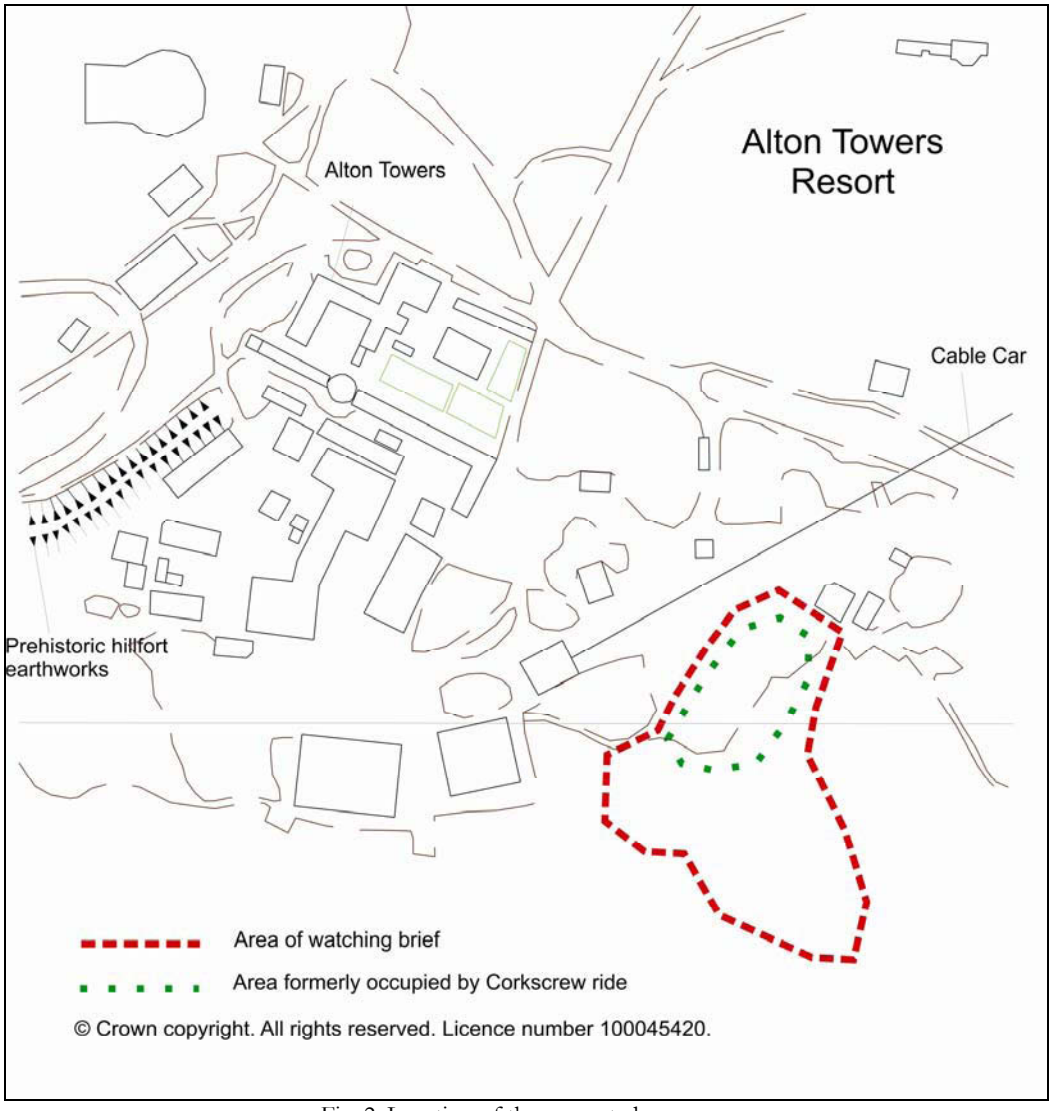

Fig. 2: Location of the excavated area

5. Watching Brief Results

5.1 Fifteen initial test pits measuring 2m x 2m in the area of the former corkscrew rollercoaster at SK 073 430 (Area A) revealed no archaeological deposits (Fig. 3). In this area gently sloping sandstone bedrock [004] was overlain by up to 2m of hardcore stone [001] and [002], deposited for the foundations of the corkscrew (Fig.4). If any archaeological remains were ever present in this area they were removed during these works. In two test pits a thin layer of crushed sandstone was observed [003] but this appeared to have been created as a result of the dumping of hardcore rubble and contained modern brick fragments and metalwork debris. Further observations where made of groundworks in this area but no archaeological features where observed.

Figure 3. Location of test pits within the area formerly occupied by the corkscrew pleasure ride.

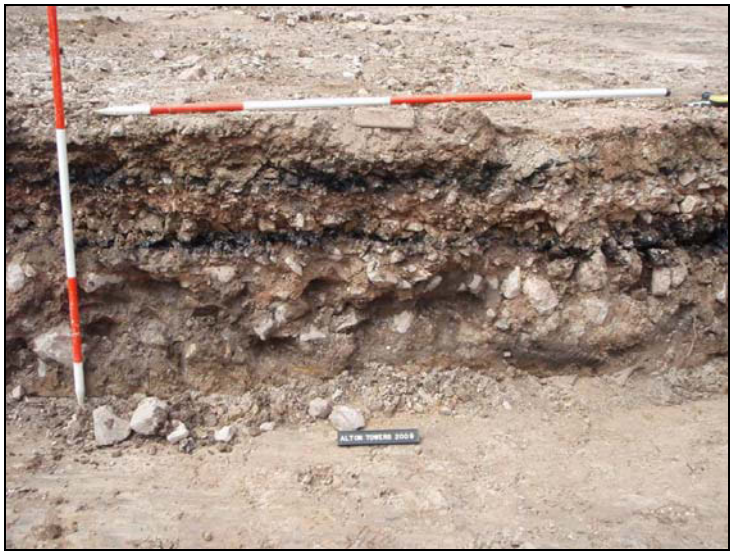

Figure 4. Stratigraphy in the area formerly occupied by the corkscrew pleasure ride

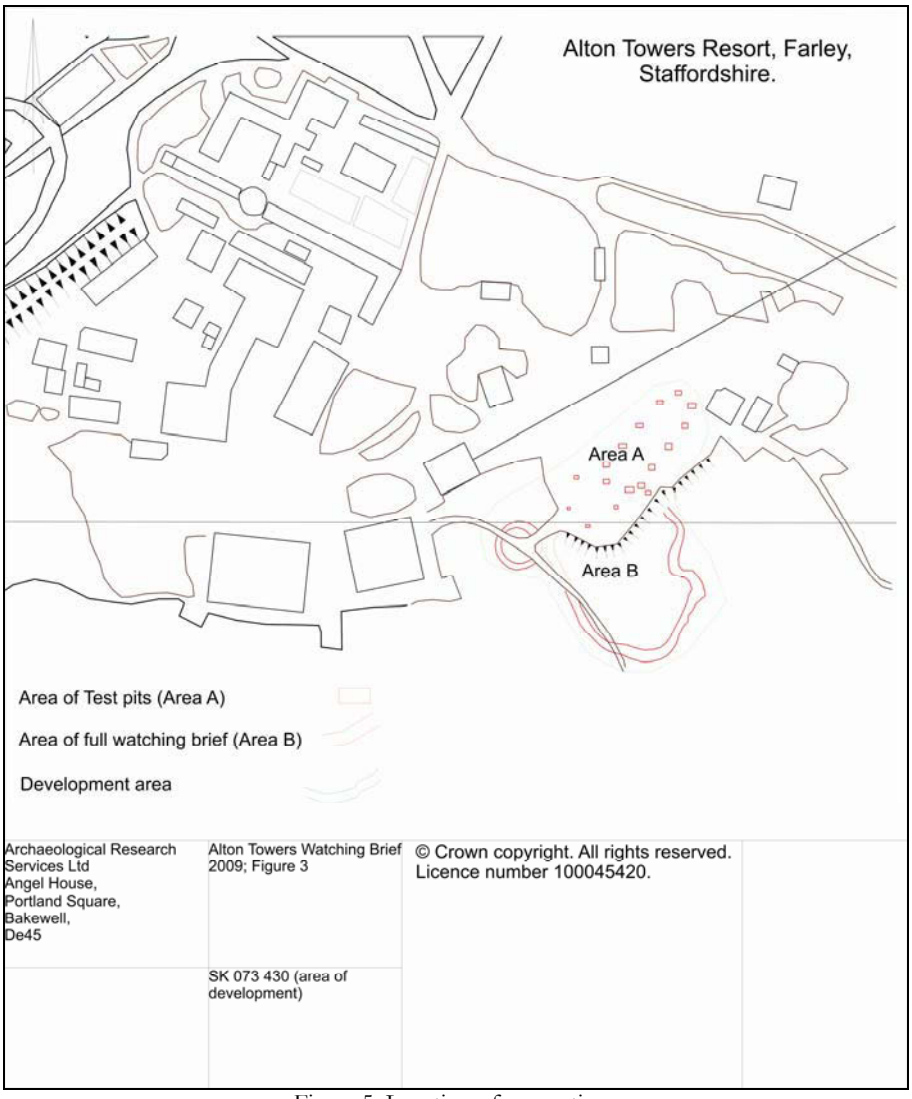

Figure 5. Location of excavations

5.2 In the woodland (Area B) excavation of small foundation pits for the supports of the new ride where observed (Fig 5.). These measured from 1m^2 to 2.7m^2 and the excavations were observed down to bedrock (Fig. 5). All were excavated with a toothless ditching bucket and revealed a deep layer of redposited sandy clay [006] which contained modern brick, glass and other modern debris underneath the leaf mould [009] (Fig. 6). This was apparently the result of bulldozing of the higher ground to create a platform for the corkscrew ride, the resulting spoil being deposited down slope. This layer was consistently disturbed by root action and modern debris and revealed no archaeological features.

Figure 6. Excavation of foundation pit in woodland area.

5.3 Underneath this re-deposited clay a previous layer of leaf mould [007] was still evident, and contained identifiable organic material such as decayed leaves. This again had modern brick and glass within it and was no more than 0.1m deep at its full extent.

5.4 Beneath [007] was a layer of undisturbed natural sandy clay [008] 0.35 -0.50m deep which was identified as the layer with the most archaeological potential. However this layer was cleaned and observed to have no features or finds of any kind in evidence in any of the excavated areas.

5.5 The sandy clay layer [008] overlay the sandstone bedrock [004].Again during this stratigraphic excavation no finds or features were identified.

5.6 In the wooded area several temporary tracks had been laid to allow access for the construction of the new ride. Several sections cut through one of these tracks [010] as it would need to be partially excavated in places to allow the new foundations to be put in place. It was found that the track was constructed of two key layers rubble hardcore as a foundation [011] with a metalled surface above. This was then cut [012] into the redeposited clay [009] and the sandy clay [008].

5.7 Representative sections of the woodland excavations and the test pits were recorded and all were photographed digitally, on black and white film and colour slide.

Figure 7. Section of foundation pit in woodland area showing depth of redeposited topsoil.

5.8 No further archaeological deposits or areas of any archaeological potential were recorded during the excavations.

6. Conclusions

6.1 Other than evidence of earth movement and made ground relating to the construction of the southern area of the resort no archaeological remains were observed during the ground works. Heavy disturbance had previously removed or heavily truncated any layers with archaeological potential.

7. Publicity, Confidentiality and Copyright

7. Any Publicity will be handled by the client.

7.2 Digital and paper copies of the project archive will be deposited in the Potteries museum and Art gallery in Stoke on Trent and has be assigned accession number 2009.LH.64.

73 Archaeological Research Services will retain the copyright of all documentary and photographic material under the Copyright, Designs and Patent Act, 1988.

8. Statement of Indemnity

8.1 All statements and opinions contained within this report arising from the works undertaken are offered in good faith and compiled according to professional standards. No responsibility can be accepted by the author/s of the report for any errors of fact or opinion resulting from data supplied by any third party, or for loss or other consequence arising from decisions or actions made upon the basis of facts or opinions expressed in any such report(s), howsoever such facts and opinions may have been derived.

9. Acknowledgements

9.1 Archaeological Research Services Ltd would like to thank Mark Kerrigan and the staff of Alton Towers Resort operations Ltd, all staff from T.Cruse

Groundworks Ltd for his assistance and patience during the watching brief and to Chris Lesser of Geomatic Engineering Surveys Limited who provided survey data for the location of the excavations.

10. References

British Geological Survey, 1993. (www.bgs.ac.uk)

APPENDIX I

Context Register

Context	Type		Description
001	Layer		Hardcore rubble deposit
002	Layer		Larger hardcore rubble deposit
003	Layer		Crushed sandstone layer
004	Layer		Natural Bedrock
005	Layer		Tarmac surface
006	Layer		Redeposited topsoil
007	Layer		Buried leaf mould layer
008	Layer		Sandy Clay
009	Layer		Topsoil / leaf mould in woods
010	Fill		Track surface
011	Fill		Track foundation
012	Cut		Cut for track [010]