

**3 GRASS HILL,
CAVERSHAM, READING
BERKSHIRE**

NGR: SU 7038 7514

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

June 2007

Report No. 544

Quality Assurance

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SUMMARY

Between 17th and 20th April 2007 Foundations Archaeology undertook an archaeological watching brief at 3 Grass Hill, Caversham, Reading, Berkshire (NGR: SU 7038 7514). The work was undertaken on behalf of Elegant Homes, in response to a condition of planning permission.

The proposed development comprised the construction of a new extension to an existing dwelling and two new dwellings (Planning Ref: 06/01542). The archaeological work was targeted specifically at the new houses and excludes the extension; it was agreed with Berkshire Archaeology, as advisors to Reading Borough Council, that no monitoring of the extension would be necessary.

The watching brief did not reveal any features or artefacts predating the 19th century. The earliest evidence of activity on the site was a sherd of probable 19th century pottery contained within the subsoil.

A single archaeological feature was present. It was a small, shallow pit, [105], which may have represented a garden feature, possibly a plant hole. Other than a small fragment of Post-medieval/modern CBM, no dating evidence was present within the excavated section.

GLOSSARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Archaeology

For the purpose of this project archaeology is taken to mean the study of past human societies through their material remains from prehistoric times to the modern era. No rigid upper date limit has been set, but AD 1900 is used as a general cut-off point.

CBM

Ceramic Building Material.

Medieval

The period between the Norman Conquest (AD 1066) and *circa* AD 1500.

Natural

In archaeological terms this refers to the undisturbed natural geology of a site, in this case, 3rd terrace river gravels.

NGR

National Grid Reference from the Ordnance Survey Grid.

OD

Ordnance datum; used to express a given height above sea-level.

OS

Ordnance Survey

Post-medieval

The period from *circa* AD 1500 onwards

Roman

The period from AD 43 to AD 410

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Between 17th and 20th April 2007 Foundations Archaeology undertook an archaeological watching brief at the 3 Grass Hill, Caversham, Reading, Berkshire (NGR: SU 7038 7514). The work was undertaken on behalf of Elegant Homes, in response to a condition of planning permission.
- 1.2 The proposed development comprises the construction of a new extension to an existing dwelling and two new dwellings (Planning Ref: 06/01542). The archaeological work was targeted specifically at the new houses and excludes the extension; it was agreed with Berkshire Archaeology, as advisors to Reading Borough Council, that no monitoring of the extension would be necessary. The watching brief was undertaken in accordance with the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994, revised 2001) and the Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Foundations Archaeology (2007) based on discussions with David Thomason of Berkshire Archaeology.
- 1.3 This document presents the findings of the archaeological watching brief and conforms to the specification set out in Appendices 4 and 5 of *The Management of Archaeological Projects* (English Heritage 1991).

2 SITE LOCATION

- 2.1 The study area is located in Caversham, a village on the northern outskirts of Reading, on the east side of Grass Hill. The area is located on a rise approximately 200m to the north of the River Thames. Land use prior to the current development consisted of a late 20th century house and garden. The existing house stands on a flat area of ground in the east of the site, probably terraced into the hill and the garden drops away to the southwest. The east of the site lies at approximately 48m OD and the west lies at approximately 42.50m OD. The local geology consists of River Terrace Gravels.

3 PROJECT BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The specific location has been subject to very little previous investigation despite the topographic location being one of obvious potential for anthropogenic activity. The site is situated on the second terrace of the River Thames the course of which is located less than 200 m to the south. Several find spots and sites identified through gravel extraction, and by chance during external works to domestic properties in the area, have revealed substantial evidence for the existence of prehistoric remains. The site is also located some 600 m to the northwest of the Coombe Bank, one of two earthen bank features which have been associated, although indirectly, with Saxon boundary and land demarcation being off-set from the course of the River Thames to the south.

- 3.2 Later medieval remains may also be present on the site. The Norman St Peter's Church is located c.500m to the east of the proposal area, which was the core of the village's development as a settlement adjacent to the main town of Reading during the 12th century. Caversham Court, located c. 450m to the south east of the site was, in fact, the original site of the rectory for St Peter's Church and was under the direct control of the Augustinian Priory of Notley, in Long Crendon, Buckinghamshire, the monks of which provided a priest for the small village church. Just prior to the Reformation, Caversham was given the right to provide its own priest for the church, this right falling to the tenants of the parish. It is possible that many of the Medieval buildings associated with the site were either demolished or simply stripped of their structural assets during the dissolution.
- 3.3 The study area therefore contained the potential for the preservation of archaeological features and deposits, predominantly associated with the Prehistoric and Medieval periods. This in no way prejudiced the works against the recovery of finds or features relating to other periods.

4 AIMS

- 4.1 The aims of the watching brief were to gather high quality data from the direct observation of archaeological deposits in order to provide sufficient information to establish the nature, extent, preservation and potential of any surviving archaeological remains.
- 4.2 These aims were to be achieved by the pursuit of the following specific objectives.
- i) to define, identify and record any archaeological deposits on site, and date these where possible.
 - ii) to attempt to characterise the nature of the archaeological sequence and recover as much information as possible about the spatial patterning of features present on the site.
 - iii) where possible to recover a well dated stratigraphic sequence and recover coherent artefact, ecofact and environmental samples.

5 METHODOLOGY

- 5.1 The layout of the groundworks, consisting of two building blocks, is shown on Figure 2. The foundation areas for the houses, described as Foundation 1 and Foundation 2 for the purposes of this report, were topsoil stripped then reduced to formation level with the use of a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket. In order to reduce the areas to formation level, the foundation plots were terraced into the existing hill. The southern half of Foundation 1 was reduced by 0.25m (43.10m OD) in the southwest corner, by 0.9m (43.10m OD) in the southeast corner, by 1.15m (43.10m OD) in the

northeast corner and by 1.20m (43.10m OD) in the northwest corner. The northern half of Foundation 1 was reduced by 1.20m (45.56m OD) on the eastern side and by 0.45m (45.56m OD) on the western side. The southern half of Foundation 2 was reduced by up to 1.0m (44.60m OD) on the eastern side and up to 0.55m on the western side (44.60m OD). The northern half of Foundation 2 was not stripped to natural ground, therefore it was agreed with David Thomason of Berkshire Archaeology that this area did not need to be monitored. Moreover, it was agreed that the drainage did not need to be monitored. When features or deposits of potential archaeological significance were noted, they were closely examined, defined, manually excavated (where appropriate) and recorded.

6 RESULTS

- 6.1 Natural ground was exposed in all areas monitored and consisted of chalk with occasional patches of sand and flint gravel, in places overlain by a natural deposit of yellow sand clay which formed a thin veneer of the gravel terraces, encountered at an average depth of 0.45m (43.10m OD in the southwest corner and 45.15m OD in the northeast corner) from the modern ground surface. The natural ground was overlain by subsoil (102), a mid yellow brown compact sand clay with flint gravels and occasional small chalk inclusions, 0.15m-0.25m thick. This layer was fairly clean, although a single sherd of Red Glazed Earthenware, probably dating to the 19th century, was found within this context. The subsoil was overlain by topsoil (101), a black brown loose, light, root disturbed silt sand with frequent small sub-angular flints, occasional small chalk lumps and charcoal flecks, up to 0.26m thick. Modern glass shards and a few small CBM fragments were found within this context.
- 6.2 A single possible archaeological feature, [105], was present within the monitored area. It comprised a small, shallow, sub-oval pit measuring 1.46m long by 1.36m wide by 0.13m deep. It had steeply sloping sides and a wide, slightly uneven base, sloping towards the centre. It was filled with (106), a dark brown loose, root disturbed sand clay with very frequent clinker chip inclusions. A small fragment of Post-medieval/modern CBM was present within the excavated section. It was overlain by topsoil (101) and cut subsoil (102) and natural. This feature was probably a garden feature, possibly a planting hole.
- 6.3 Some modern disturbance was present across the site in the form of modern drainage features, such as pipe trenches and manholes, although in the main the site was largely undisturbed.

7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The watching brief did not reveal any features predating the 19th century. The earliest evidence of activity on the site was a sherd of probable 19th century pottery contained within the subsoil. In general, visibility and recording conditions were good.

- 7.2 A single archaeological feature was present within the site. It was a small, shallow pit, [105], which may have represented a garden feature, possibly a plant hole. Other than a small fragment of Post-medieval/modern CBM, there was no dating evidence within the excavated section.
- 7.3 The subsoils across the site were intact, demonstrating that the lack of archaeological deposits was a true representation of the archaeological record within proposed development area. This does not preclude the possibility of surviving archaeological deposits in the vicinity.
- 7.4 The watching brief has indicated a negligible-low potential for significant archaeological remains to occur within the study area.

8 NATURE OF THE RECORD

- 8.1 The stratigraphic archive for the site consists of the following elements:

Context Sheets
Sections
Plans
Photographs

- 8.2 The on-site methodologies used to recover any evidence were set out in the Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Foundations (2007), in accordance with a brief prepared by Berkshire Archaeology. In summary the following excavation methods were utilised; observation of all groundworks associated with the construction of the new building. All site recording was undertaken in accordance with the WSI. The records are available in the archive.
- 8.3 Following the completion of the Watching Brief an ordered, indexed, and internally consistent site archive has been compiled in accordance with Appendix 3 of The Management of Archaeological Projects (English Heritage 1991). This archive is currently held at Foundations Archaeology and will be deposited at an appropriate museum within six months.
- 8.4 A summary of the contents of this report is available from Project OASIS at <http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/project/oasis/>

9 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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10 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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FIGURE 1: Site Location

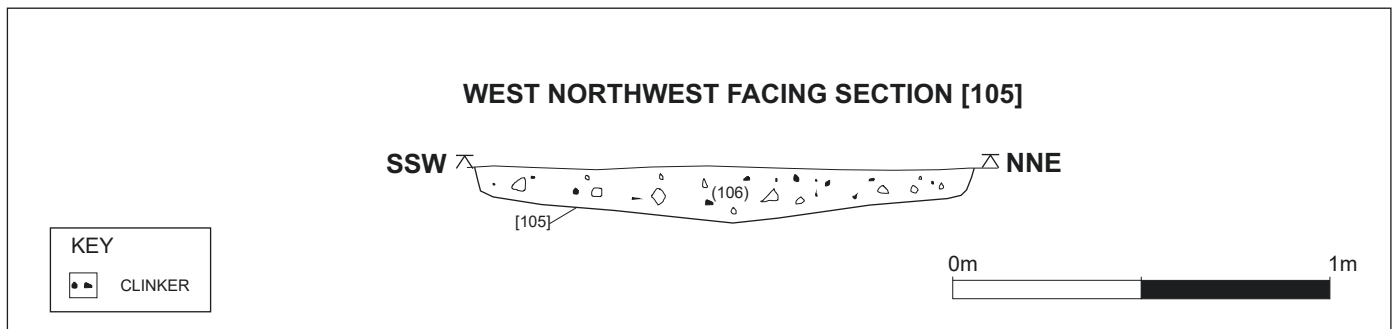
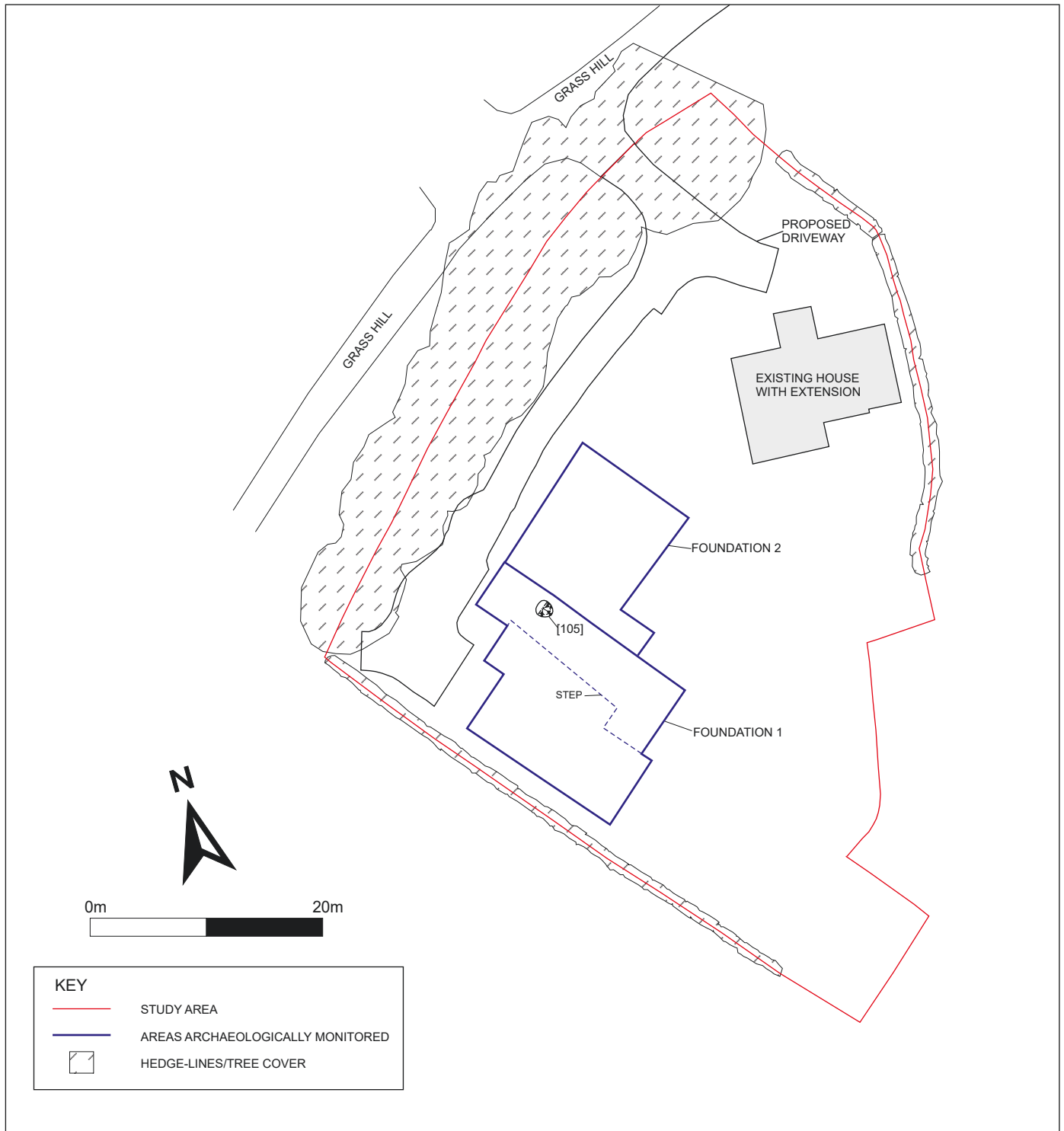


FIGURE 2: Site Plan and Section of [105]