

Car Parking Site, Great Western Hospital, Swindon: Archaeological Strip and Record

**CAR PARKING SITE, GREAT WESTERN HOSPITAL,
SWINDON, WILTSHIRE**

NGR: SU 8230 1915

ARCHAEOLOGICAL STRIP AND RECORD SURVEY

Report No. 314

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SUMMARY

Site Name: Great Western Hospital, Swindon, Wiltshire

Grid Reference: SU 8230 1915

Site Activity: Archaeological Strip and Record Survey

Date and Duration of Project: 6th to 13th June 2003

Project Manager: Roy King

Site Supervisor: Diana Mayer

Site Code: GWH03

Area of Site: approximately 9000m²

Summary of Results: In June 2003 Foundations Archaeology undertook a programme of archaeological strip and record survey on land at the proposed Car Parking Site, Great Western Hospital, Swindon, Wiltshire (Figure 1). The work was commissioned by Dan Slatcher of John Samuels Archaeological Consultants on behalf of Gordon Currie of DPDS Consulting. The archaeological works comprised the monitoring of the groundworks associated with the construction of a new car park for the Great Western Hospital.

No archaeological finds or features were located in the northern half of the study area. In the southern portion of the site, however, a series of ephemeral linear features and a single discreet feature were present. The features appeared to be consistent with the remains of a derelict field and land drainage system. The archaeological deposits remain undated due to the paucity of artefactual evidence.

Location and Reference of Archive: Swindon Museum; accession code: to be confirmed

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.

Medieval

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

Natural

In archaeological terms this refers to the undisturbed natural geology of a site, in this case, chalk.

NGR

National Grid Reference from the Ordnance Survey Grid.

OD

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

OS

Ordnance Survey

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 From 6th to 13th June 2003 Foundations Archaeology undertook a programme of archaeological strip and record survey on land at the proposed Car Parking Site, Great Western Hospital, Swindon, Wiltshire (NGR: SU 82301915) (Figure 1). The work was commissioned by Dan Slatcher of John Samuels Archaeological Consultants on behalf of Gordon Currie of DPDS Consulting.
- 1.2 The project involved observation of the groundworks associated with the construction of a new car parking area, which were carried out under archaeological supervision. The site is located within an area of known archaeology, particularly relating to the Bronze Age and Romano-British period, consequently any groundworks required for the proposed development had the potential to reveal significant archaeological deposits and/or finds. This in no way prejudiced the archaeological works against the recovery of finds or features related to other periods.
- 1.3 The works were undertaken in accordance with a Project Design prepared by Foundations Archaeology (2003). The project was undertaken in accordance with the *Standards for Archaeological Assessment and Field Evaluation in Wiltshire* (1995).
- 1.4 This document presents the findings of the archaeological programme of strip and record excavation.

2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The works covered by this project were undertaken as part of an application to construct a new car parking area for the use of the Great Western Hospital. A condition requiring an archaeological programme of strip and record was attached to the planning permission due to the location of the development within an area of known archaeology. Archaeological finds and features have been uncovered in the vicinity at the Intermediate Care Unit site, at the site of the proposed park and ride scheme (Foundations 2002) and, also, in the area of the main hospital buildings. The site therefore contained the high potential for the preservation of additional archaeological remains, predominantly associated with Bronze Age activity and Romano-British settlement.
- 2.2 Prior to commencement of the project the study area consisted of pasture land. The study area was fairly flat, but declined marginally towards the south. The base geology consists of Upper Greensand and Gault overlain by orange brown clay.

3 AIMS

- 3.1 The aims of the archaeological monitoring 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.
- 3.2 These aims were achieved through pursuit of the following specific objectives:
- i) to define and identify the nature of archaeological deposits on site and to 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) to recover a well dated stratigraphic sequence and recover coherent artefact, ecofact and environmental samples.

4 METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 The groundworks involved the removal of topsoil and overburden onto solid ground across the whole site area. This was predominantly done using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket. All excavation exposing the natural substrate was subject to archaeological supervision; i.e. some parts of the site were not to be stripped to natural ground. In practice, however, all groundworks penetrated to the natural substrate. Consequently, the areas excavated to a greater depth than expected had been stripped without the supervision of an archaeologist. These areas were subsequently 'cleaned-up' using a mechanical excavator with a grading bucket under constant archaeological supervision. Spoil tips were scanned for unstratified finds across the entire study area.
- 4.2 On completion of stripping of an area, all archaeological features and deposits were hand excavated as appropriate.

5 RESULTS

- 5.1 No archaeological deposits or features were present in the northern half of the site. However, the strip and record excavation revealed a series of ephemeral linear and discreet features in the south portion of the study area.
- 5.2 The stratigraphy across the site comprised natural orange brown clay deposits, encountered at 0.20m to 0.26m below the existing ground level (116.654m OD to

116.854m OD). The natural geology was directly overlain by a mid brown silt clay topsoil.

- 5.3 A single linear feature, [3], was situated on an approximate north-south alignment, close to the centre of the southern half of the site. It was ephemeral, had indistinct, uneven edges and appeared to meander across the site as opposed to running in a straight line. It was 64m in length, but probably originally extended further: at either end the feature faded out, probably having been truncated away. Its width varied erratically from 0.5m to 1.5m wide and the depth from 0.10m to 0.20m. The feature's profile was of gently sloping sides and wide, fairly flat base. It was filled with (4), a light grey brown firm, slightly plastic silt clay with occasional small flint inclusions. No artefactual evidence was recovered from the feature. Feature [3] intersected with two other features, [5] and [17], however the equally ephemeral nature of these features rendered the relationships indistinguishable. It is possible that linear [3] was equivalent to feature [604] as identified in Trench 6 of the Foundations Archaeology Commonhead Park and Ride evaluation in 2002.
- 5.4 Feature [5] was probably a part of linear feature [3]. It was 0.98m in width, 0.04m in depth and had gently sloping sides and a flat base. It was filled with (6), a light grey brown firm, plastic silt clay, almost identical to (4).
- 5.5 Linear feature [17] cut at right angles across the southern extent of [3]. It was a very shallow (0.03m in depth) gully with sloping sides and flat base, 0.42m in width. It was filled with (18), a light grey brown firm, slightly plastic silt clay with less than 1% flint nodule inclusions. The feature was only clearly visible for a 0.8m length, but it may have originally extended across the site, its ephemeral nature rendering it impossible to distinguish further. No artefactual evidence was recovered from this feature.
- 5.6 The final three linear features present, [19], [21] and [23], were situated in the southern extent of the study area. It is likely these features represented furrow bases. Each ran on a parallel, north-west/south-east alignment. All three features were shallow (0.09m-0.14m) and irregular and, with the exception of [19] which was slightly deeper (0.14m) and had a rounded base, had gently sloping sides and flat base. Each feature was filled with a similar material of light grey brown, firm, plastic silt clay with less than 1% flint nodule inclusions. The widths of the features varied from 0.6m to 1.44m, but this irregularity most likely reflects what remains of the (probably) truncated features, as opposed to their original form. Linear feature [19] was 34m in length, [21] 20m in length and [23] 32m in length, however all three were possibly originally longer, most likely having been latterly truncated. A single iron nail was recovered from linear [21].
- 5.7 A further five discrete features, [7], [9], [11], [13] and [15], were situated in the southern half of the area. Of the five, all but feature [9] lay in very close proximity to linear [3]. The contiguity of these features to [3], their shallow depth

- and identical fills suggest they may have originally been part of linear [3]. It is possible [3] was originally 4m to 5m in width, but was latterly so truncated as to appear as a series of shallow features in a linear alignment.
- 5.8 Feature [7] was an irregular 'hourglass' shaped pit with shallow sloping sides and a flat base. It measured 4.8m in length, 1.2m-1.6m in width and 0.06m in depth and was filled with (8), a light grey brown, firm, plastic silt clay with less than 1% flint nodule inclusions. Feature [11] was small sub-oval pit with gently sloping sides and flat base. It contained (12), a light grey brown, firm, plastic silt clay with less than 1% flint nodule inclusions, and measured 1.01m in length, 0.96m in width and 0.05m in depth. Pits [13] and [15] lay in close proximity. Pit [13] was a shallow, irregular 'pear-shaped' feature with sloping sides and flat, uneven base. It measured 1.98m in length, 0.78m in width and 0.04m in depth and contained fill (14), a light grey brown, firm, plastic silt clay with less than 1% flint nodule inclusions. Feature [15] was an elongated oval pit or gully segment with steeply sloping sides and a rounded base. It measured 1.51m in length, 0.43m in width and 0.10m in depth and was filled with (16), a light grey brown, firm, plastic silt clay with less than 1% flint nodule inclusions. No artefactual evidence was recovered from any of the features.
- 5.9 The final feature, [9], was a shallow, oval pit or post-hole with gently sloping sides and a flat, uneven base. It was filled with (10), a light grey brown, firm, plastic silt clay with less than 1% flint nodule inclusions and measured 0.9m in length, 0.55m in width and 0.03m in depth. No artefactual evidence was present within the feature.
- 5.10 A single linear feature of modern origin was present in the south-east corner of the site. Within the fill fragments of turf were noted thereby implying it had been excavated within the last five years. It is possible this feature was equivalent to linear [704] found in evaluation Trench (Foundations Archaeology 2002).
- 5.11 Artefactual evidence was very sparse across the study area. A single, unstratified sherd of abraded medieval pottery was recovered from the northern half of the site. Unfortunately, the sherd was too abraded for accurate identification.

6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The archaeological programme of works revealed an absence of archaeological features or deposits in the northern half of the site. In the southern portion of the study area, however, a series of ephemeral features were present. All the features were very shallow and irregular which implied they had been severely truncated, possibly during a previous episode of levelling or persistent ploughing of the area. This fact, combined with a near total absence of stratified artefactual evidence, rendered interpretation of the features difficult.

- 6.2 The features appeared to be consistent with the remains of a derelict field and land drainage system. The four southernmost linear features ([17]-[23]) most likely represented furrow bases. The single stratified artefact, an iron nail, from [21] cannot be relied upon as dating evidence as it could easily have been residual or intrusive material. The remaining features, with the exception of [9], could be the truncated base of a linear feature 4m to 5m in width. It may have originally formed a drainage channel, implied by its apparent cessation at the start of the field system. It is also possible, due to its irregular formation, that it represented a palaeochannel. Further interpretation of feature [9] is, however, not possible. In addition, it is likely that the activity represented in the study area was contemporary as each feature was filled with an almost identical material.
- 6.3 The strip and record survey results revealed a low level of archaeological activity within the study area. The Mid Bronze Age domestic occupation identified during the Foundations Archaeology evaluation in 2002 did not extend into the latest study area. Moreover, no evidence was found to indicate that the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age complex found during the 1999 Cotswold Archaeological Trust evaluation or the 2nd century Roman features identified during both evaluations extended into project area.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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