

**74 Mount Pleasant Road,
Alton, Hampshire**

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For Fleet Homes 2000 ltd

by James McNicoll-Norbury

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code MPR 07/91

December 2008

Summary

Site name: 74 Mount Pleasant Road, Alton, Hampshire

Grid reference: SU 7177 3884

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 21st October – 3rd December 2008

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Simon Cass, James McNicoll-Norbury

Site code: MPR 07/91

Area of site: c. 0.15ha

Summary of results: No archaeological deposits were identified

Monuments identified: None

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Hampshire Museum Service in due course.

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74 Mount Pleasant Road, Alton, Hampshire An Archaeological Watching Brief

by James McNicoll-Norbury

Report 07/91b

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at 74 Mount Pleasant Road, Alton, Hampshire (SU 7177 3884) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Jason Leete of Peter Leete and Partners, Estate Agents, The Green, Headley Road, Greyshott, Hindhead, Surrey, GU26 6LG, on behalf of Fleet Homes 2000 Ltd, 6 Kings Road, Fleet, Hampshire GU51 3AD.

Planning consent (app no F.49134/FUL) has been granted by East Hampshire District Council for the construction of four new houses on the site, following the demolition of the existing structures. The proposed new buildings were to occupy much of the same area as the existing buildings. A pre-determination and pre-demolition evaluation of the site did not reveal any deposits of archaeological interest but could not examine the entire area. Due to the proximity of the site to a Saxon inhumation cemetery, a planning condition was attached to the consent requiring an archaeological watching brief to take place during groundworks. This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the District Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Ms Hannah Fluck, archaeological officer of Hampshire County Council advising the District Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by Simon Cass and James McNicoll-Norbury between 21st October and 3rd December 2008 and the site code is MPR 07/91.

The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Hampshire Museum Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on the south side of Mount Pleasant Road, approximately 400m south of the historical core of Alton. The site is bounded to the north-west by the London to Winchester railway line, which here passes through a very steep cutting. It is bounded to the east and south by residential properties (Fig. 2). The site was previously occupied by two bungalows. The site slopes up quite steeply from west to east, from c. 122m to 125m above Ordnance Datum. According to the British Geological Survey the underlying geology consists of Middle Chalk deposits (BGS 1990) which was observed across the site.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site derives primarily from its location close to (approximately 50m west of) an early/middle Saxon cemetery, which was partially excavated in the 1960s and again prior to construction of new housing in the 1980s (Evison 1988). The cemetery comprised both inhumations and cremation burials, and at least 147 individuals were recorded. The burials were furnished with grave goods, sometimes elaborately so. The cemetery is regarded as being of national importance due to the richness of the grave goods, which included items of imported metalwork. A small number of Roman finds (coins, pottery) were also recorded. From the archaeological work carried out in the 1960s it seemed highly likely that the cemetery extended westwards down the hill, and that further burials or associated deposits of similar date may be present in adjacent areas including the proposed development area; however work in the 1980s seems to have established the western limits, with the original excavations having established southern and eastern limits, and the area of the current site was not designated an Area of Archaeological Importance in a recent review (HCC 2002). Further burials were, however discovered in 1992, including one that seems to span the crucial Roman/Saxon transitional period (Russel 2002), so that it is not clear that the entire extent of this cemetery has yet been defined. A previous evaluation of the site consisting of four trenches (Wallis 2007) did not identify any archaeological features although three sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from the topsoil of two of the trenches with the remainder of finds being post-medieval.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to monitor areas exposed during groundworks on the site and any archaeological deposits which are threatened by the development will be excavated and recorded. All finds and artifacts were to be retained, though all but a sample of some classes of building material would be discarded after recording. In the event of any discovery of extensive and complex archaeological deposits, the scope of the watching brief will be discussed in consultation with the client and the county archaeological officer.

Results

The watching brief comprised examination of the deeply invasive ground disturbing activity, namely the digging of the foundation trenches. The footings were dug to a depth of 0.70–1.20m and between 0.70–0.80m in width (Fig. 3). The stratigraphy consisted of up to 0.45m topsoil directly overlying natural chalk geology (Fig. 4). The southern edge footings of Unit 3 were severely truncated by a previous cellar. The original footings from

the previous building could also be seen where the new footings were dug. No archaeological features were identified in the areas covered by the new footings.

Finds

No finds of archaeological interest were retrieved during the fieldwork.

Conclusion

Despite the site lying in close proximity to a Saxon cemetery no archaeological finds or deposits were found during the course of the watching brief. The absence of any subsoil across the whole site suggests that the site had previously been stripped of overburden presumably prior to construction of the previous structures on the site.

References

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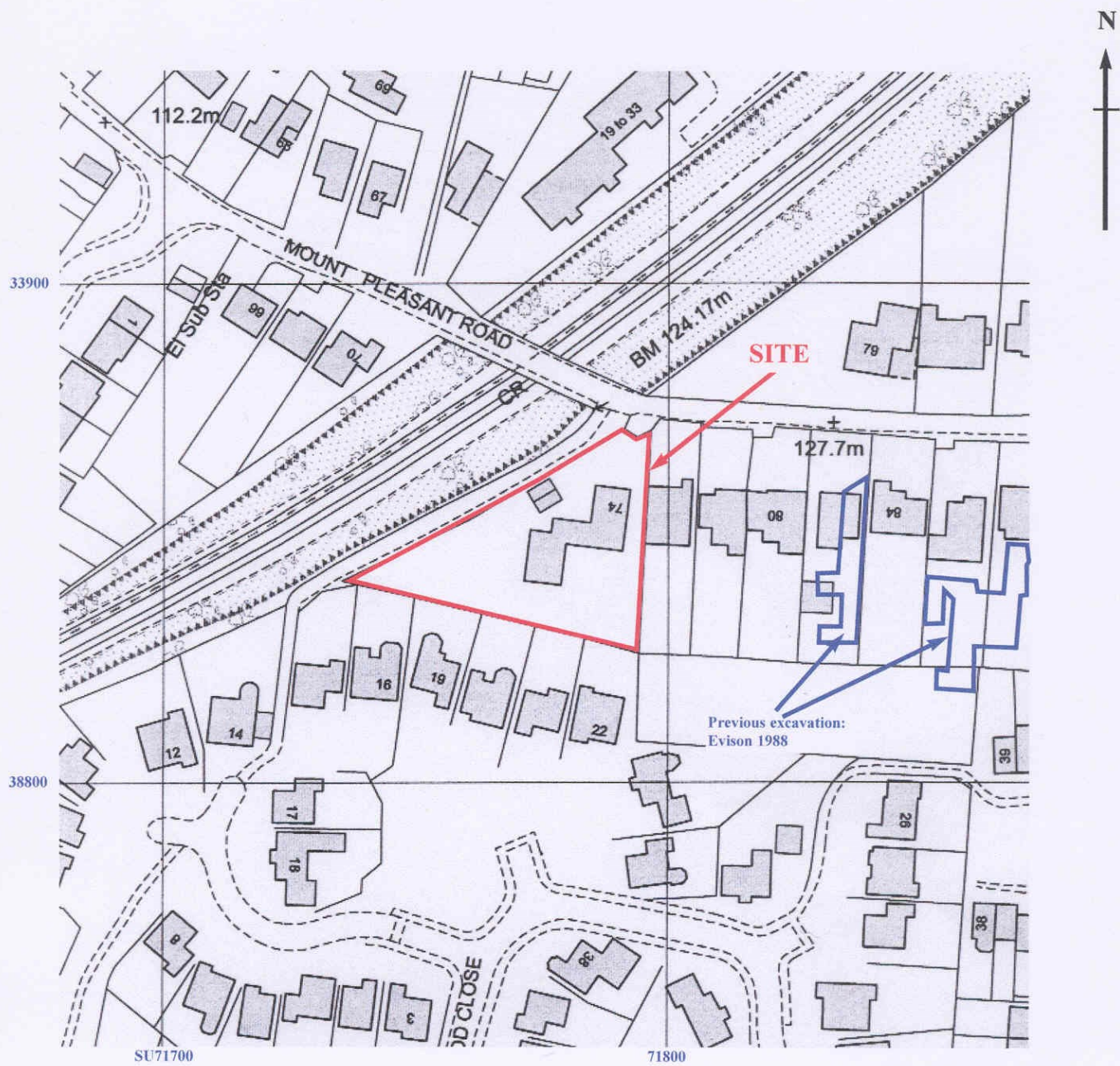


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Archaeological watching brief**

Figure 1. Location of site within Alton and Hampshire.

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Archaeological Watching Brief**

Figure 2. Detailed location of site off Mount Pleasant Road, in relation to Saxon cemetery excavations.

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Figure 3. Location of groundworks and previous evaluation trenches (1-4).

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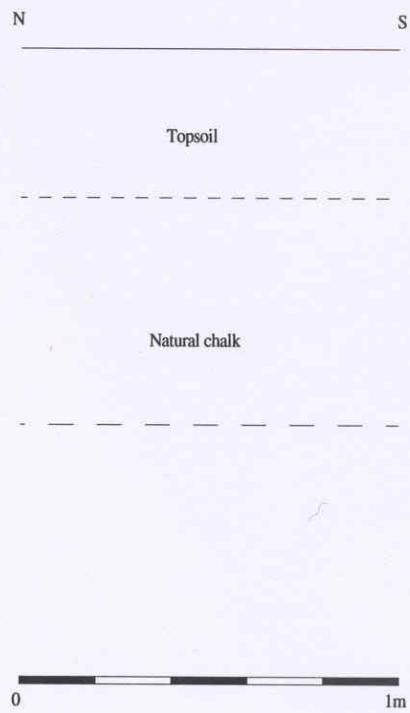


Figure 4. Representative section of foundation trenches.