

# **Beenhams, Railway Lane, Littlemore, Oxford**

**An Archaeological Watching Brief**

**For Vanderbilt Homes Ltd**

by Andrew Mordin

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code BLO 07/83

**June 2009**

## Summary

**Site name:** Beenhams, Railway Lane, Littlemore, Oxford

**Grid reference:** SP 5353 0265

**Site activity:** Watching Brief

**Date and duration of project:** 17th April–2nd June 2009

**Project manager:** Steve Ford

**Site supervisor:** James McNicoll-Norbury, James Lewis

**Site code:** BLO 07/83

**Area of site:** *c.* 0.3ha

**Summary of results:** Three cut features were noted during the groundworks. Two were certainly of late post-medieval date whereas the other remains undated.

**Location and reference of archive:** The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum Service, with the accession number OXCMS:2009:32.

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Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford✓ 23.06.09 Steve Preston✓ 25.06.09
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# **Beenhams, Railway Lane, Littlemore, Oxford**

## **An Archaeological Watching Brief**

by Andrew Munding

**Report 07/83b**

### **Introduction**

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at Beenhams, Railway Lane, Littlemore, Oxford (SP 5353 0265) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Geoff Murrain of Vanderbilt Homes, 30 High Street, Woodstock, Oxfordshire, OX20 1TG.

Planning permission has been gained from Oxford City Council (06/00387/FUL) to construct new housing and associated access, subject to a condition (18) relating to archaeology stating that ‘no development shall proceed until the developer has secured the implementation of a scheme of mitigation of any significant archaeological impact, which may be achieved by redesign, or by archaeological recording action’.

An evaluation carried out on the site in March 2009 revealed a sparse number of cut features of modern or late post-medieval date. Two features were possibly of 12th-13th century, or later, date. Residual Roman pottery sherds were found in one feature on the west side of the site (Lewis and McNicoll-Norbury 2009). As there was the possibility of further archaeological deposits being present, in order to mitigate the effects of construction on these an archaeological watching brief was required to fulfil the condition on the planning consent.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment’s Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the City Council’s policies on archaeology. The fieldwork was undertaken in accordance with a written scheme of investigation approved by Mr David Radford, Oxford City Council Archaeologist, and was carried out by James McNicoll-Norbury, Tim Dawson and James Lewis between 17th April to 2nd June 2009. The site code is BLO 07/83. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at with Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course, with accession code OXCMS.2009:32.

### **Location, topography and geology**

Littlemore is situated on the southern edge of Oxford. The development site consists of two parcels of land, an L-shaped area on the north of side Railway Lane, directly opposite the main site, which is an irregular-shaped area of ground, situated between Railway Lane and Sandford Road (Fig. 2). The main site is bound by the dismantled Thame branch-line to the south-west. The development area had been cleared of the previous site

structures (greenhouses, garages, a fallout shelter and light industrial buildings) and undergrowth, prior to the evaluation. Only No.3 Railway Lane was retained on site, and will be incorporated into the new housing development. The underlying geology is mapped as Beckley Sands (BGS 1993), a sand and calcareous sandstone mix which was observed in all ground workings. The site lies at an elevation of *c.*70m above Ordnance Datum (OD).

## **Archaeological background**

The site is thought to be located within or on the fringe of the late Saxon and medieval core of Littlemore village. Archaeological work in the area has uncovered evidence for Roman industry and Anglo-Saxon settlement, mostly investigated during construction of the Science Park to the south-east (information from Oxfordshire HER). Roman pottery and kiln remains were noted to have been uncovered during the hospital's construction in 1843 (Ford 1995). An evaluation carried out at Lawn Upton House on Sandford Road, just to the south of the Church of St Mary and St Nicholas, north-east of the current site, revealed a range of deposits of medieval date (Ford 1995). A four-trench evaluation, close to the current site on Sandford Road (RPSC 1996), revealed medieval pits below a late medieval ploughsoil, and a post-medieval boundary wall. Roman and Saxon pottery sherds were recovered from later deposits on the latter site, suggesting there may have been earlier settlement present.

Of wider significance however, is the evidence for Roman pottery production. Many kiln sites have been plotted between Rose Hill and Cowley, the products of which were traded widely across southern England, with good access from the Alchester to Dorchester-on-Thames Roman road (Henig and Booth 2000; Young 1977; Challis 2005). The barn attached to Beenhams is a Grade II listed building.

## **Objectives and methodology**

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the ground works. The fieldwork was to comprise examination of areas of intrusive ground works, in particular ground reduction for the new access roads and the digging of foundation trenches and soakaways in areas to the west of the site.

## Results

The watching brief comprised two components of fieldwork: examination of topsoil and overburden stripping for the new access roads and selected foundation trenches for the new buildings (Fig. 3).

### *The access roads*

The access road in the north-eastern corner of the site was located in the area where two possible medieval features had been located during the evaluation. This area was evenly reduced of topsoil and overburden to reveal the natural geology. Prior to removal of the subsoil, pit 20 was revealed which on investigation produced late post-medieval and modern pottery. Once the subsoil had been removed, another pit/posthole (21) was noted which cut the natural geology. It had straight sides and a slightly rounded base, filled with dark grey silty sandy clay (71), and measured 0.3m in diameter and 0.19m deep. This feature contained no finds.

The main access road traversing the centre of the site was examined in a similar fashion. This road provided a large sample across the site. It revealed a deep-cut, straight sided feature (22) which was cut down into the natural geology (Fig. 4). The position and profile of this feature seem to relate it to feature 7 in the evaluation which was post-medieval in date. Its top was noted at 0.6m below existing ground level. Its dimensions were 1.4m wide, 0.96m deep and at least 0.72m in length, though no base was reached. Its secondary fill was a dark grey sandy clay (73) with small pieces of animal bone. The basal fill (72) which lined its north-western side was a dark grey sandy clay. No datable remains were recovered either fill.

A small undated layer of limestone rubble (74) was noted in a section of a trench dug for a new soakaway/drain within the road corridor.

### *The building footprints*

Four of the building plots were examined (Fig. 3).

#### Plot 1

The area near Plot 1, where the evaluation had uncovered residual Roman pottery from a medieval or later feature (pit or ditch 9, with a possible recut 8), was viewed with restricted access, due to unstable sides of the foundation trenches. The footings were 0.8m wide and dug to a depth of c.0.5m. The natural geology was uncovered only in that part of the trenching on the eastern side of the footing. On re-excavation of the area of the evaluation trench, the extent of pit 9 was found to the east which was noted to be 1.9m wide and 1.8m long, and it can probably be confirmed as a pit rather than a ditch. No further finds or features were noted in this area. Evidence from the evaluation made pit 9 medieval or later.

#### Plots 9, 10 and 11

Another focus for these works was the area in the centre and south of the site close to Trenches 3, 5 and 7, where other features were noted during the evaluation. These footings were generally a uniform depth of 0.6m and were no more than 0.85m wide. These works all exposed natural geology but uncovered no additional archaeological features, though it was noted that the subsoil showed varying degrees of truncation here, especially to the south. This had probably been due to the removal of the shelter that had been situated in this area.

#### Plot 12 and 13

These footings were a uniform depth of 0.5m, and were 0.7 to 0.8m wide. Again, only in parts was the natural geology uncovered in these trenches, mostly to the south. Deep modern made ground was noted here over 0.4m in depth. No further features were noted in the base of trenching.

### **Finds**

Finds were initially collected from topsoil and subsoil deposits during excavation of the northern access road, in the area where pits/post-holes 20 and 21 were uncovered. Pottery was also recovered from pit 20. All pottery from this feature was of 18th- to 20th-century date, mostly glazed and unglazed red wares. This feature also contained one late post-medieval clay pipe stem. The finds recovered from the topsoil were white china.

Unclassifiable animal bone was also noted from topsoil deposits and pit 20, and though small scraps of animal bone were recovered from feature 22, these were also too small for further classification.

Two pieces of 19th-century brick were recovered from the subsoil during the machining for the road.

None of these finds have been retained.

### **Conclusion**

The watching brief has revealed a small number of cut deposits, all of which are either undated or of late post-medieval date. No additional finds of Roman or medieval date were recovered, and no further light could be shed on the date of pit 9, which was remains no better dated than 'medieval or later'. The watching brief therefore confirms the results of the earlier evaluation, which suggested that use of the site in medieval and earlier periods was light.

## References

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**Beenhams, Railway Lane, Littlemore,  
Oxford, 2009**  
**Archaeological watching brief**

Figure 2. Location of site off Railway Lane.

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# Beenhams, Railway Lane, Littlemore, Oxford, 2009



Figure 3. Location of areas observed during the groundworks and earlier evaluation trenches.

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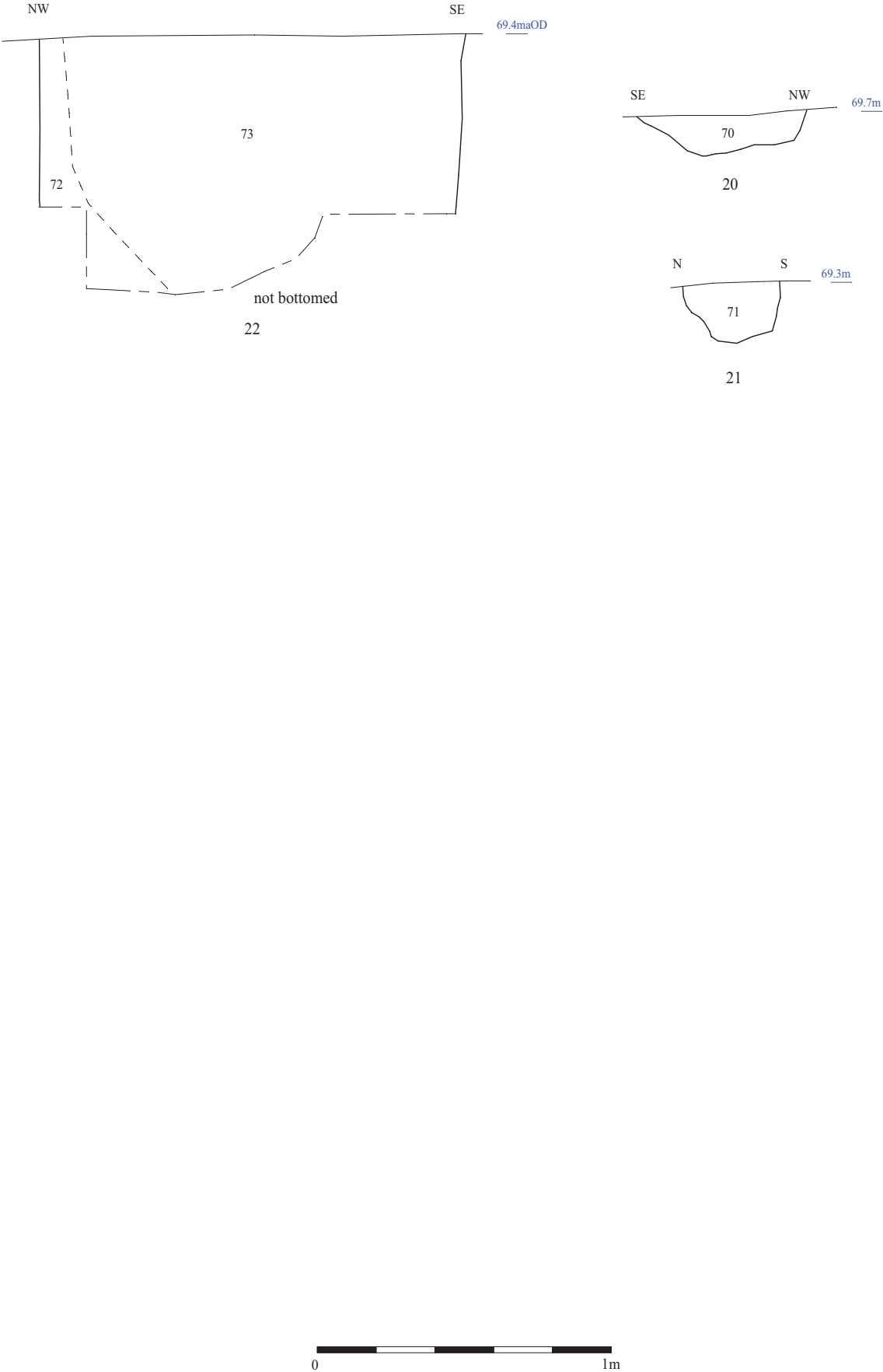


Figure 4. Sections.