

Hyde Laundry, Winchester – HLW11

Context information for specialists

Site Background

The study area (NGR: SU 48250 29895) is defined as the former Hyde Laundry premises located at the junction of Hyde Abbey Road and Gordon Road within the extra-mural suburb of Hyde, approximately 80m north of the Roman and medieval city defences, with planning consent being granted for a mixed commercial/residential development conditional upon the satisfactory completion of an archaeological programme of work. Its location within an area of high archaeological sensitivity suggests that any archaeological remains encountered will be of a similar quality to those discovered in excavations immediately to the north of the site. Two trenches were excavated: Trench 1 outside the building to the north of the site, and Trench 2 within the building to the west of the site.

Historical and Archaeological Background

Prehistoric: Information regarding the date, nature and extent of prehistoric activity in the vicinity of the site is extremely limited. The Hyde Laundry site is situated approximately 100m N of the NE corner of the substantial Iron Age *oppidum* or defended settlement enclosure of Oram's Arbour, which appears to have been established in the 1st or 2nd century BC at a strategic crossing point of the River Itchen. Traces of a fairly large V-shaped ditch and an associated turf rampart probably associated with the Oram's Arbour enclosure (the maximum visible extent being 5.6m wide and over 3m deep) were identified during excavations in 1964 close to the junction of North Walls and Hyde Abbey Road (MWC 6595; Biddle, 1965, 239-40).

Evidence for prehistoric occupation to the N of the defended enclosure of Oram's Arbour is extremely limited. An excavation carried out in 1997-8 on the site of the former Marston's Brewery in Hyde Street, approximately 100m SW of the study area) prior to residential development revealed a complex of pits containing relatively unabraded pottery, burnt flint and an inverted horse skull, interpreted as being of late Iron Age date (WMS, 1998)

Roman: The Hyde Laundry site lies on the eastern fringes of the extra-mural suburb which appears to have extended to the N of the Roman walled city of *Venta Belgarum*, along the course of the road to Silchester (running roughly parallel and to the E of Hyde Street). The extent of the suburban area to the N of the Roman town has not yet been fully established and consequently it is possible that archaeological deposits and features associated with Roman suburban activity may be encountered within the study area. Archaeological records of Roman activity in the immediate locality of the Hyde Laundry site are restricted to chance finds of a small quantity of Roman coarseware pottery sherds of 2nd-3rd century date made at No. 50 Hyde Abbey Road (EWC 7817) and a bronze coin of Constantine I found in gardens at No. 27 Hyde Abbey Road (EWC6455).

However, archaeological evidence suggesting that the extra mural settlement may have extended further to the E of the Silchester road than has usually been assumed is supplied by the results of a recent programme of archaeological investigation at the Marstons Brewery site (located to the SW of the study area) undertaken in 1997-8 (WMS, 1998).

The excavations undertaken in the SW corner of the former Marston Brewery site revealed deposits and features associated with Roman suburban occupation immediately E of the probable line of the Silchester road, evidence for which appeared to have been destroyed by the presence of post-medieval cellarge connected with the Brewery. The depth at which

Roman occupation features were identified varied between 1.1 to 1.5m beneath the ground level of the modern workshop. Of particular significance was the discovery of a metalled surface consisting of smoothed flints, approximately 6.9m wide and oriented E-W, with evidence of repair and usage extending into the late Roman period. Interpreted as a probable extra-mural street branching to the E of the Silchester road, its existence strengthens the possibility for further evidence of Roman suburban occupation to have extended eastwards towards present day Hyde Abbey Road.

Evidence of a late Roman or early post-Roman phase of activity on the site, either contemporary with or post-dating the metalled surface was represented by a series of shallow intercutting, badly truncated pits (some of which may actually have been animal burrows) containing a small quantity of heavily abraded Roman pottery, and a large square pit (2m square) cut into the metalled road surface. This large pit, extending to a depth in excess of 2.5m, contained a large quantity of animal bone and pottery (chiefly of late Roman date). The sequence of deposits within the pit indicated at least two distinct phases of use, initially as a cess pit and subsequently as a domestic rubbish pit, separated by a substantial orange clay sealing deposit around 0.8m in thickness.

Medieval/Post-medieval: The available historical evidence relating to the study area, though somewhat limited, nevertheless clearly indicates that the study area lay within an extensive area of enclosed water meadows during the medieval and post-medieval periods (until the construction of the Hyde Laundry in 1888), lying at least 30-40m to the N of the medieval City ditch and to the S and SE of the monastic precinct of Hyde Abbey (founded in about 1110).

By the 10th century, the meadows to the N of the city ditch appear to have been considered as part of the urban area of Winchester and may have been associated with the defensive system of the city (Keene, 1985, 947). The ownership of these meadows during the late Saxon-early Norman period is somewhat unclear but it appears that they were in the possession of Hyde Abbey by no later than the 13th century. It is possible that they may have been included with the grant of 'a certain meadow lying to the north of the renowned city of Winchester, which the River Itchen bounds on the east' made by King Ethelred II to Bishop Aethelgar of Selsey (also abbot of the New Minster) in 983 (Rumble, 2002, 149-55).

The Abbey's tenure of the water meadows immediately N of the city ditch was disputed by the Crown on several occasions during the 13th century; the records of these disputes indicate that a significant proportion of these meadows had probably been enclosed with ditches by the late 13th century. In spite of these disputes with the Crown, it appears that Hyde Abbey largely retained possession of these water meadows until the Dissolution and they subsequently formed part of the post-Dissolution estate of Hyde House which remained largely intact until the mid 19th century.

Early cartographic evidence, in particular John Speed's map of 1611 and two later 18th century maps of the Hyde House estate, indicate that the study area lay within the eastern part of a large tract of land bounded by the Hyde Abbey Mill stream to the N, Upper Brook to the E and the City ditch to the S. This tract of land, shown as heavily planted with trees on Speed's map, appears to have been bisected into two unequal parts by a watercourse extending S of the Mill stream to the City ditch and is referred to on the Bedford estate map of c.1738 as Upper and Lower Park respectively. This watercourse appears to have survived (albeit partially altered) until the late 19th century as it is shown on the OS 1st edition 1:500 map dated 1873 and appears to have run approximately N-S through the western half of the present Hyde

Laundry site. It subsequently appears to have been covered over when the existing Hyde Laundry site was built in 1888-89 and is not shown on the OS 2nd edition map of 1897.

The archaeological investigations appear to corroborate the documentary evidence indicating that the site was open water meadows subject to flooding throughout the medieval and post-medieval periods, indicated by the deep alluvial peats revealed during evaluation trenching undertaken in 1986 on the former Gordon Road timber yard immediately N of the Hyde Laundry site.

Contexts including worked(?) flint:

Trench 2
(212)

Moderately compacted mid grey clayey silt and flint nodules contains pot, bone, oyster shells and possible worked flint, extends >1.93m × >1.64m × >0.3m. Underlies (219) Same as (227)

Interpretation

Silt clay/gley deposit underlying the chalk surface (219) identified in the N extent of Trench 2 but appearing to extend throughout the excavated area