NOVA MK
MILTON KEYNES

A PROGRAMME OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION DURING GEO-TECHNICAL TEST PITTING

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Preface

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This report has been prepared by Joe Abrams (Project Manager). The fieldwork was undertaken by Mick Garside (Archaeological Technician). Joan Lightning (CAD Technician) produced the figures. All Albion Archaeology projects are under the overall management of Drew Shotliff (Operations Manager).

Albion Archaeology is grateful to Simon Mortimer, John Samuels Archaeological Consultants for commissioning the project. We would like to acknowledge the co-operation of Jim Poole, Capita – Symonds who undertook the test pitting.

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Structure of the Report

After the introductory Section 1, there is a summary of the results of the fieldwork in Section 2, followed by a brief conclusion (Section 3). Section 4 is a bibliography.

Key Terms

Throughout this report the following terms or abbreviations are used:

Albion	Albion Archaeology
Client	John Samuels Archaeological Consultants
IFA	Institute of Field Archaeologists
Procedures Manual	*Procedures Manual Volume 1 Fieldwork*, 2nd *Edition 2001*. Bedfordshire County Council

Non-Technical Summary

Albion Archaeology was commissioned by John Samuels Archaeological Consultants to undertake a programme of archaeological observation during geo-technical test pitting at the Nova MK development area in Milton Keynes.

The programme of archaeological observation was undertaken between 23rd May and 2nd June 2006. A mechanical excavator was used for all excavations.

The aim of the monitoring was to determine the presence/absence of archaeological features and/or deposits within the areas of test pitting and also to try to build up a picture of the extent of disturbance from previous land use.

A largely homogeneous sequence of soils, derived from the underlying Oxford Clay, was revealed across the site. No archaeological deposits or artefacts were encountered in any of the test pits.

No significant areas of modern disturbance were revealed within the test pits. An area of modern disturbance/made ground is known to exist in the north-western corner of the site. This was not tested during the site works. However, if they formerly existed, any archaeological remains in this area are likely to have been either destroyed or badly damaged, effectively reducing its archaeological potential to very low.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Albion Archaeology was commissioned by John Samuels Archaeological Consultants to undertake a programme of archaeological observation during geo-technical test pitting at the Nova MK development area.

1.2 Site Location and Description

The development area is located north-east of Milton Keynes (Figure 1) and is centred at NGR TL 9160 3854. It lies at a height of *c.*70mOD and the local soils are derived from the underlying Oxford Clay. At the time the observation works were undertaken the land was in mixed use (arable and set-aside/pastureland).

2. ON-SITE OBSERVATION AND RECORDING

2.1 Introduction

The programme of archaeological observation was undertaken between 23rd May and 2nd June 2006. During this period, all groundworks which required monitoring were completed. A mechanical excavator was used for all excavations.

Detailed technical information on all the deposits and archaeological features referred to below are preserved in the site archive.

2.2 Methodology

The archaeological works adhered to the following standards and field methods:

1 All test pits were monitored to try to identify *in situ* archaeological deposits.
2 All disturbed soil was scanned for artefacts.
3 Any excavated deposits were fully recorded in accordance with Albion's *Procedures Manual* (Albion Archaeology 2001).
4 All observations were tied in to the OS national grid.
5 A photographic record of the work was created.

In addition to the above, the archaeological observations sought to gather data which would provide information on more recent land use. For example, could areas of modern quarrying, construction and other disturbance be identified? If so, what would this tell us about the archaeological potential of the development area? Were certain parts of the site better preserved than others?

Attention was also given to the possibility of recording changes in the topography and naturally derived deposits (colluvium/alluvium) within the area.

2.3 Extent and Nature of Test Pitting

Sixty-three test pits were excavated within the *c*.92ha development area (Figure 2). They were 0.42m wide and between 1.80m and 3.00m long and 2.40m and 2.70m deep.

2.4 Results

2.4.1 Topsoil, Subsoil and Undisturbed Geological Deposits

Four deposits were encountered in every test pit:

- Topsoil
- Subsoil
- Upper undisturbed geological deposit
- Lower undisturbed geological deposit

The lower undisturbed geological deposit was a blue/grey clay. This was encountered at the following depths across the site:

Depth below ground level	Location within development area
1.40m	Centre, TP 39
1.50m	South-western corner, TP 1
1.00m	South-eastern corner, TP 13
2.35m	North-western corner, TP 46
1.20m	North-eastern corner, TP 63

Table 1: Depths at which lower (blue/grey clay) geological deposit encountered

This variety in depth is due to the variability in depth of the upper undisturbed geological deposit; an orange/grey sandy clay which contained sand and gravel inclusions. Details of this variability are shown in Table 2.

Thickness of deposit	Location within development area
0.50m	Centre, TP 39
1.20m	South-western corner, TP 1
0.30m	South-eastern corner, TP 13
1.30m	North-western corner, TP 46
0.40m	North-eastern corner, TP 63

Table 2: Thickness of upper orange/grey clay geological deposit

Clearly, this layer reaches its maximum thickness in the western part of the site.

Subsoil varied from dark grey/brown to mid orange/brown silty clay and was generally *c*.0.40m thick, although it varied in thickness slightly across the site.

This subsoil forms a distinct layer between the biologically active topsoil and the underlying geological deposits.

Topsoil was a dark brown silty clay which measured between 0.20m and 0.45m in thickness.

2.4.2 Archaeological deposits

No archaeological deposits or artefacts were encountered in any of the test pits.

Previous experience on sites with similar geology, topography and recent land use would suggest that any surviving archaeological features would be visible in a trial trench at a depth of between 0.35m and 0.45m below ground level. They would generally be exposed by removal of the topsoil and the upper part of the subsoil horizon.

2.4.3 Modern disturbance

Anecdotal evidence gathered during the observation works suggests that an area of significant modern disturbance lies in the north-western part of the site, to the west of TP 58 and north of TP 46. This area was formerly used as a plant showground, within which excavating machines were tested and demonstrated.

No test pits were excavated in this area. If this area has been subject to modern disturbance, its archaeological potential is likely to have been reduced to very low, relative to the rest of the development area.

Post-medieval/modern land drains were also encountered during the works. These generally cause only localised damage to underlying archaeological remains.

3. SYNTHESIS

The aim of the monitoring was to determine the presence/absence of archaeological features and/or deposits within the areas of test pitting and also to try to build up a picture of the extent of disturbance from previous land use.

The sequence of soils, derived from Oxford Clay, was largely uniform across the site. No archaeological deposits or artefacts were encountered in any of the test pits.

No significant areas of modern disturbance were revealed within the test pits. An area of modern disturbance/made ground is known to exist in the north-western corner of the site. This was not tested during the site works. However, if they formerly existed, any archaeological remains in this area are likely to have been either destroyed or badly damaged, effectively reducing its archaeological potential to very low.

4. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Albion Archaeology. 2001. *Procedures Manual, Volume 1: Fieldwork. 2nd Edition.*

Figure 1: Site location map

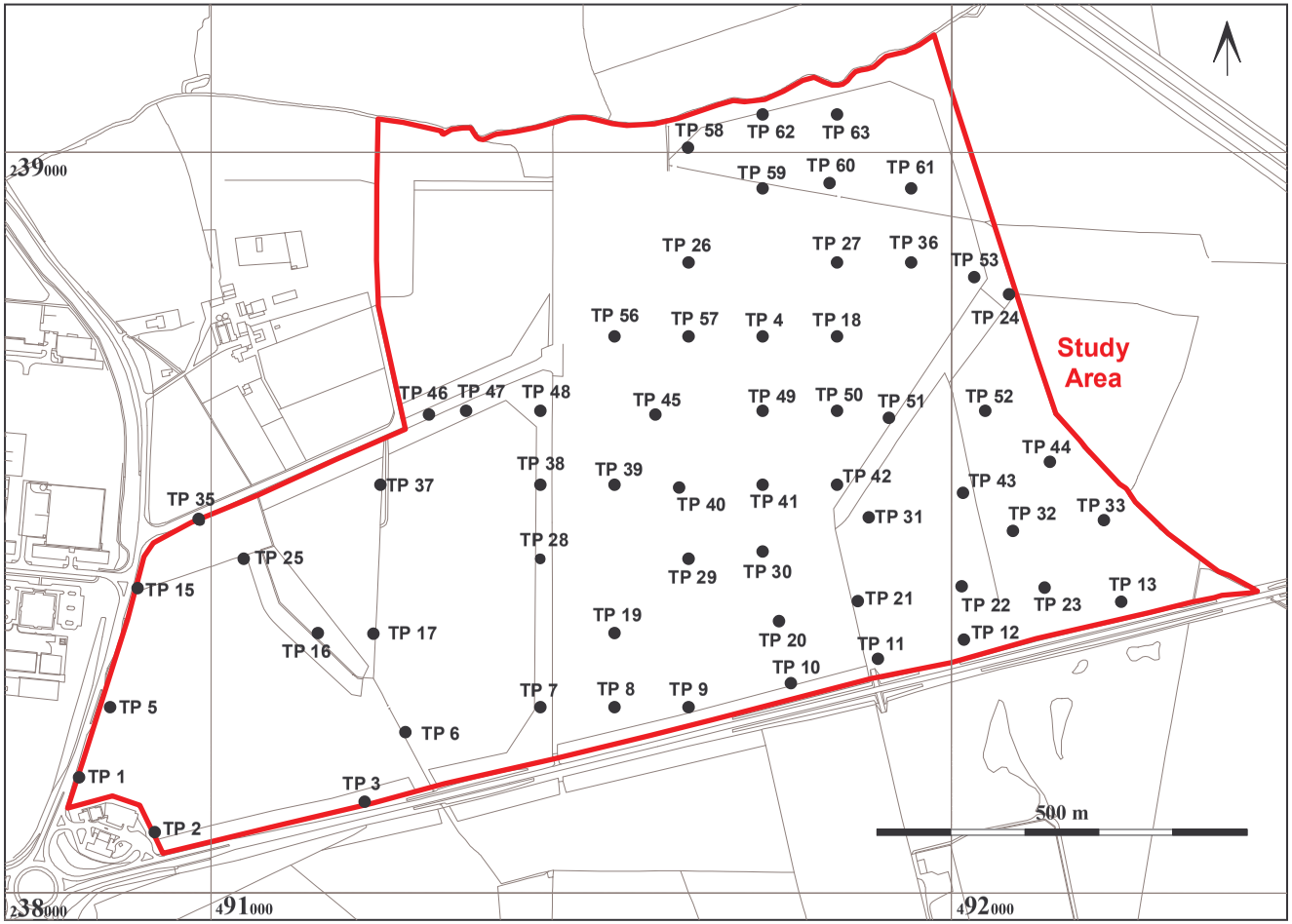

Figure 2: Test pit location map