Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION:
JAMES COURT
BATH ROAD, READING
BERKSHIRE

NGR: SU 6977 7250

on behalf of Crest Nicholson (South) Ltd

Gareth Shane BSc & David Fell BA MA MIFA
with contributions from P Allen & C P Green

May 2011

ASC: 1350/RJC/2

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Site Data

ASC project code:	1350	*ASC project no:*	RJC
OASIS ref:	archaeol2-97922	*Event/Accession no:*	REDMG:2011.622
County:	Berkshire		
Village/Town:	Reading		
Civil Parish:	Reading		
NGR (to 8 figs):	SU 6977 7250		
Extent of site:	*c.*4200 sq m		
Present use:	Recently demolished care home and grounds		
Planning proposal:	Construction of apartment block		
Planning application ref/date:	09/01183/FUL		
Local Planning Authority:	Reading Borough Council		
Date of fieldwork:	March 2011		
Client:	Crest Nicholson (South) Ltd Crest House Pyrcroft Road Chertsey Surrey KT16 9GN		
Contact name:	Mike Walker/ Kim Webster		

Internal Quality Check

Primary Authors:	Gareth Shane & David Fell	*Date:*	23rd May 2011

Revisions:		*Date:*	

Edited/Checked By:		*Date:*	

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Figure 1: General location *(Scale 1:25,000)*

Summary

In March 2011 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken at James Court, Reading in order to inform proposals for the redevelopment of the site. Three trial trenches and one geo-archaeological test-pit were excavated. No significant archaeological features or artefacts were present in the trial trenches and the construction of the former James Court building is likely to have extensively disturbed or destroyed any late prehistoric and later features which may have been present. The results of the geo-archaeological test-pit indicate that deposits of the Lynch Hill gravel series survive on the development site and offer the potential for recovery of artefacts of the earlier prehistoric periods.

1. Introduction

1.1 In March 2011 *Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd* (ASC) carried out an evaluation at James Court, Reading, Berkshire. The project was commissioned by *Crest Nicholson (South) Ltd* following discussions with the archaeological advisor (AA), *Berkshire Archaeology*, acting on behalf of the local planning authority (LPA), *Reading Borough Council*, and was carried out to a project design prepared by *ASC* (Fell, 2011).

1.2 *Planning Background*

This evaluation was required under the terms of *Planning Policy Statement 5* (PPS5), as a condition of planning permission for the development of the site. The relevant planning application reference is 09/01183/FUL.

1.3 *Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd*

ASC is an independent archaeological practice providing a full range of archaeological services including consultancy, field evaluation, mitigation and post-excavation studies, historic building recording and analysis. ASC is recognised as a *Registered Organisation* by the Institute for Archaeologists and is also accredited ISO 9001, in recognition of its high standards and working practices.

1.4 *The Site*

1.4.1 *Location & Description*

The development site is situated in Reading, Berkshire (Fig. 1). It lies to the southwest of the town centre, close to the junction of Bath Road and Southcote Lane and is centred on Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference SU 6977 7250 (Fig. 2).

The development site comprises a rectangular plot of land of *c.*4200 sq m. Previously occupied by the buildings and grounds of the former James Court care home, it is currently a demolition site. Access is from the south, off Southcote Lane. The land is flat and lies at an elevation of *c.*57m OD.

1.4.2 *Geology & Topography*

The assessment site is within an urban area and the natural soil profile has been severely disturbed. The underlying geology comprises Lynch Hill Fourth Terrace Gravels (BGS, Sheet 268).

1.4.3 *Proposed Development*

The development proposal comprises the demolition of the existing buildings and the construction of an apartment block. The new building is to occupy approximately the same footprint as the previous building (Fig. 3).

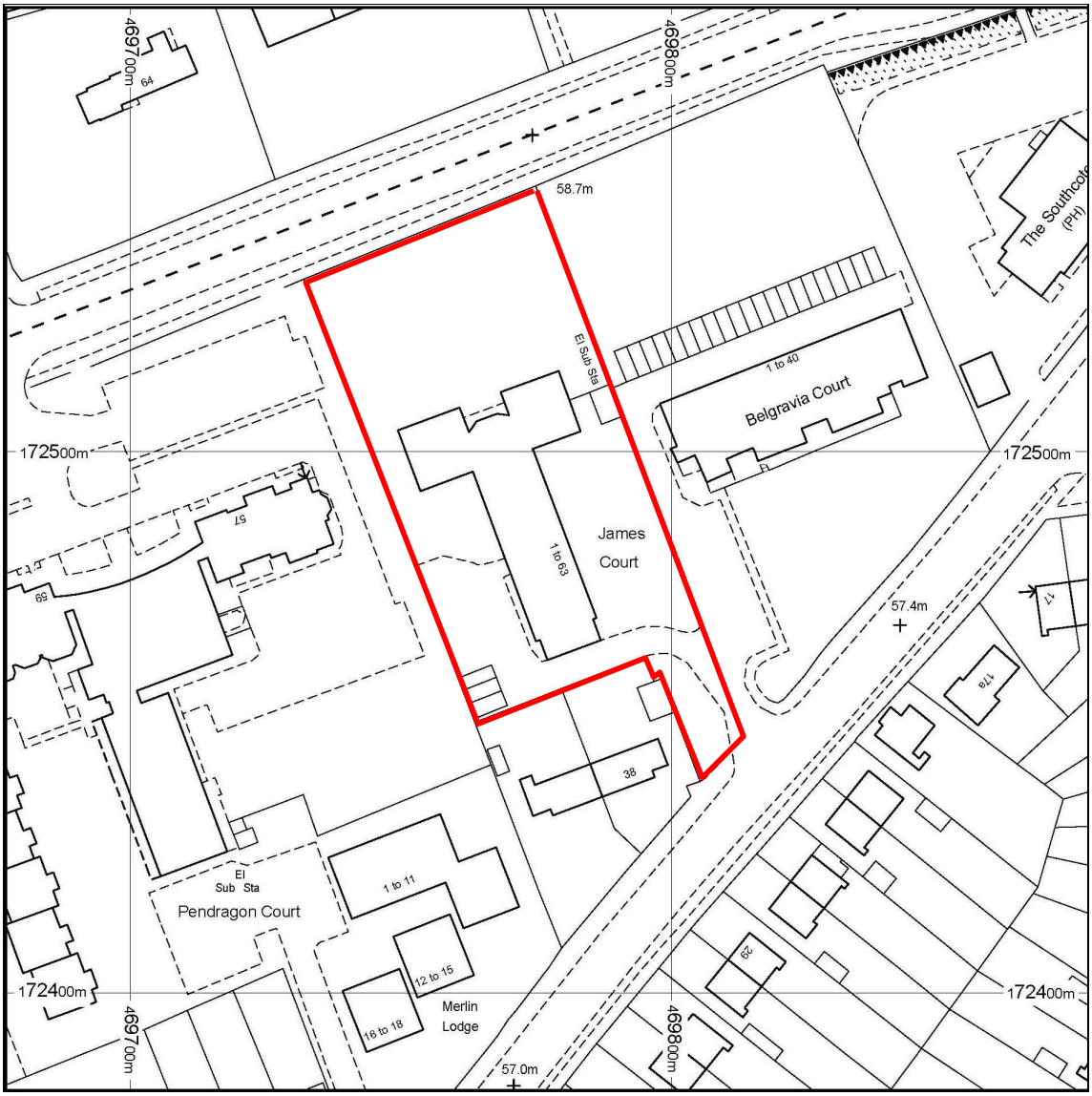

Figure 2: Site plan *(Scale 1: 1250)*

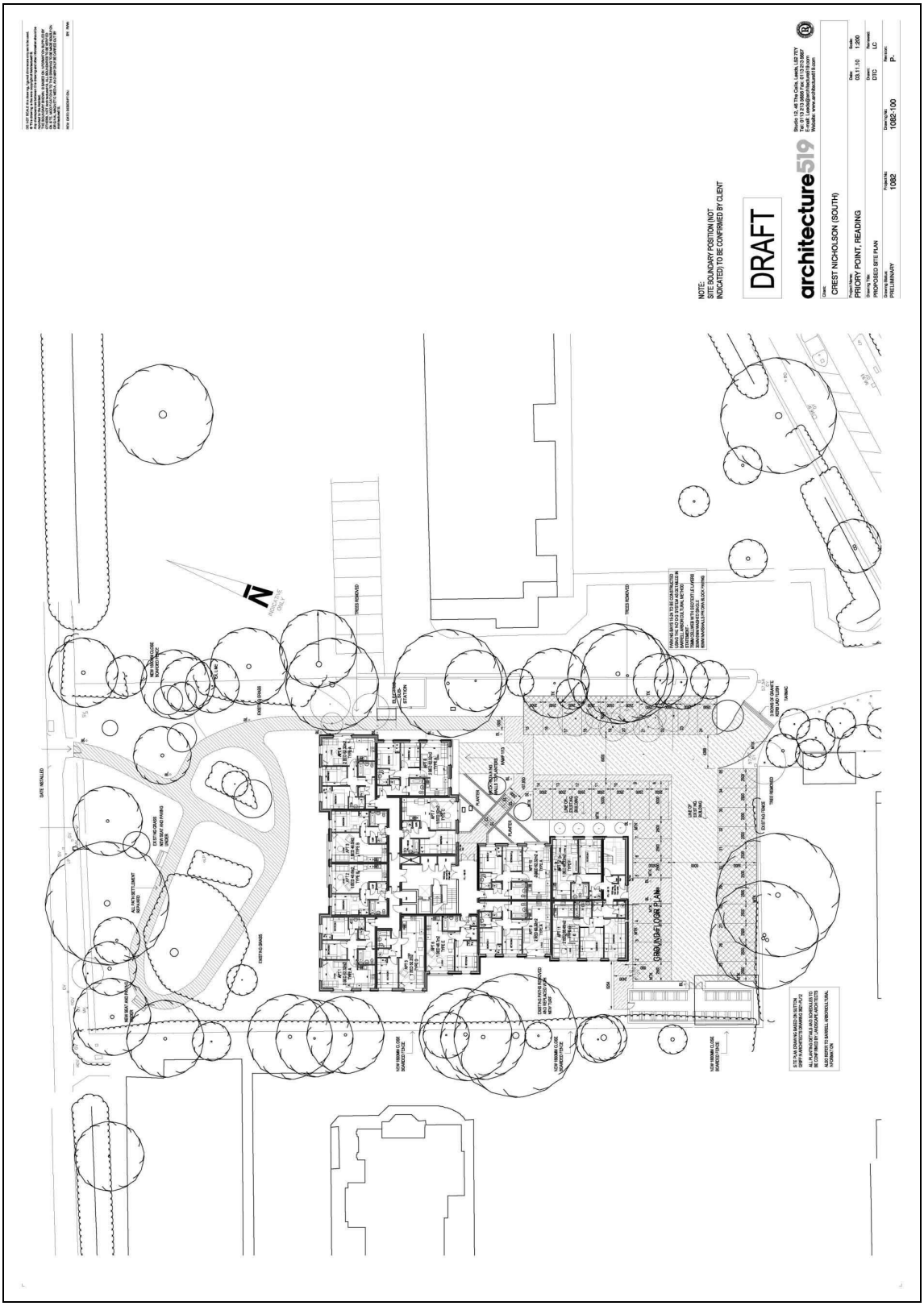

Figure 3: Plan of the proposed development *(not to scale)*

2. Aims & Methods

2.1 *Aims*

As described in the project design (Section 6.1), the aims of the evaluation were:

- To determine or confirm the general nature of any remains present
- To determine or confirm the approximate date or date range of any remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence
- To determine or confirm the approximate extent of any remains
- To determine the condition and state of preservation of any remains
- To determine the degree of complexity of the horizontal and/or vertical stratigraphy present
- To determine or confirm the likely range, quality and quantity of any artefactual evidence present.
- To determine the potential of the site to provide palaeoenvironmental and/or economic evidence and the forms in which such evidence may be present.
- Particular attention was paid to the potential for the discovery of early prehistoric artefacts and ecofacts associated with the Lynch Hill gravel.

2.2 *Standards*

The work conformed to the project design, to the relevant sections of the Institute for Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct* (IFA 2000) and *Standard & Guidance Notes* (IFA 2001) and *Code of Conduct* (IFA 2000a), to Berkshire Archaeology's *General Standards for Fieldwork Projects* to English Heritage guidelines (EH 1991, EH 2006), and to the relevant sections of ASC's own *Operations Manual.*

2.3 *Methods*

The work was carried out according to the project design (Section 6.3), which required:

- Excavation of a geoarchaeological test-pit through the entire depth of the gravel deposits. The test pit was situated to the north of the former building in order to expose an undisturbed sequence of gravel deposits
- A geoarchaeologist analysed a section of the test-pit to assess the potential for the survival of in-situ Palaeolithic artefacts and deposits
- Three trial trenches were excavated across the footprint of the proposed building and access route.
- All machine work was supervised by an archaeologist/geoarchaeologist.
- Spoil heaps were scanned for artefacts

2.4 *Constraints*

2.4.1 Due to the presence of a number of large soil heaps it was necessary to adjust the locations of the trenches. Minor adjustments were made to the locations of Trenches 1 and 2 and Trench 3 was relocated to the west and sampled both the footprint of the proposed building and part of the car park to the south (Fig. 4).

3. Archaeological and Historical Background

3.1 An archaeological impact assessment was prepared as part of the project design (Fell 2010, section 2). The following paragraphs provide a summary of the archaeological and historical background to the development site, taken from the project design.

3.2 The research undertaken indicated that no archaeological remains were known from the development site but that a variety of remains are known in the surrounding area, notably Palaeolithic implements from the Lynch Hill gravels which were recorded during gravel extraction to the west of the development site.

3.3 There is currently no evidence for Roman activity on the development site but a number of artefacts of this period have been recorded in the surrounding area. The Saxon and medieval settlement at Reading was situated *c.*2km east of the development site and during these periods the area probably comprised open land, part of the open field landscape on the periphery of the medieval town.

3.4 The development site is situated immediately south of Bath Road, which is shown on historic mapping from the 18th century. The development site probably comprised open land until the construction of a large detached house during the early 20th century. This building was probably demolished during the 1960s and replaced by the James Court care home, which was itself demolished in early 2011.

4 Results

4.1 *Introduction:*

4.1.1 This section provides a summary of the results of the evaluation. Full descriptions, in tabulated form, are provided in Appendix 1.

4.1.2 Three trial trenches and a geo-archaeological test-pit were excavated (Fig. 4) using a mechanical excavator fitted with a 2.5m wide toothless bucket operating under continuous archaeological supervision. Following excavation each trench was cleaned sufficiently to determine if archaeological remains were present. Basic trench information was recorded on pro-forma sheets and a photographic record was made. The spoil heaps were scanned for the presence of artefacts.

4.2 *Results*

4.2.1 *Trench 1* (Plates 1 and 2)

Trench 1 was situated in the central part of the development site and tested the footprint of a proposed basement car park. The east part of the trench lay within the footprint of the former James Court building while the west half was situated within the former garden.

The natural strata in this area comprised yellowish orange gravel (101) and in the west end of the trench, away from the footprint of the building, it was recorded at a depth of *c.*0.35m. Elsewhere along the length of the trench, within the footprint of the former building, a greater depth of truncation had taken place and the truncated top of the gravel was reached at a depth of 0.75m.

The natural soil profile was severely truncated but subsoil which comprised mid yellowish brown sandy silt (100) was present at the west end of the trench at a depth of *c.*0.2. The upper part of the trench profile comprised modern building debris (102) derived from the former James Court building. A number of modern drainage runs and concrete pads were present along the length of the trench.

Plate 1: General view of the west end of Trench 1

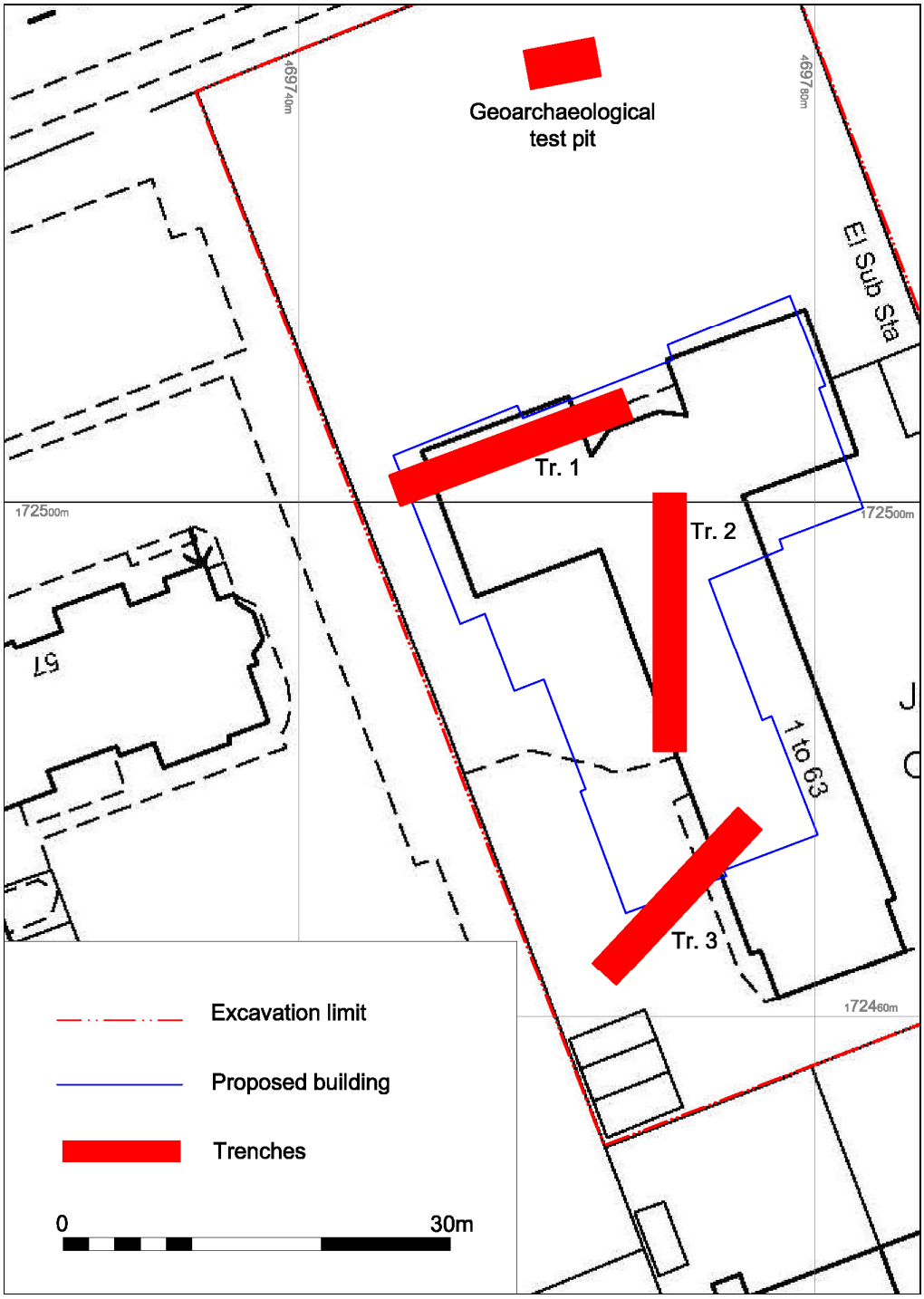

Figure 4: Trench location plan

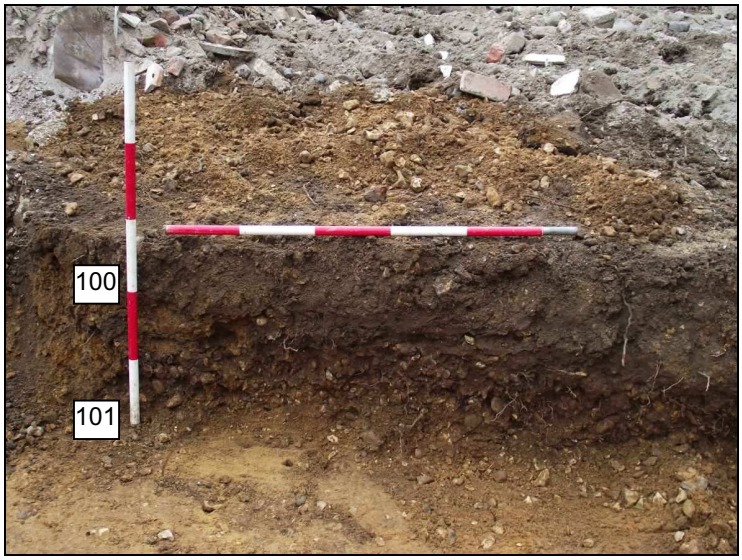

Plate 2: Profile of the west end of Trench 1

4.2.2 *Trench 2* (Plate 3)

Trench 2 was situated in the central part of the development site and tested the footprint of the former James Court building. The material in the trench comprised a mixed deposit of mid brown silty clay and modern building debris (200). A sondage was excavated at the south end of trench in order to investigate the depth of this deposit. For health and safety reasons excavation ceased at a depth of 1.2m but the natural gravel had not been reached.

Trench 2 contained only modern debris which is not archaeologically significant.

Plate 3: General view of Trench 2 looking south

4.2.3 *Trench 3* (Plate 4)

Trench 3 was situated in the southern part of the development site. The east part of the trench was situated within the footprint of the former building and the trench tested the footprint of the former James Court building and former car park.

The natural gravel in Trench 3 comprised yellowish brown silt and gravel (301). It was only present in the west part of the trench, beyond the limit of the former building and was present at a depth of *c.*0.4m.

The east part of the trench lay within the footprint of the former James Court building and the natural gravel had been truncated. This part of the trench contained a mixed deposit of clay and modern building debris, similar to the modern material in Trench 2 (200). Excavation extended to a depth of *c.*0.4m but the natural gravel was not reached.

The upper part of the profile of the trench comprised clay and modern building debris (302), which extended across the entire length of the trench and merged with the underlying debris (300) at a depth of *c.*0.4m.

Plate 4: General view of Trench 3 looking southwest

4.2.4 *The Geo-Archaeological Test-Pit* (Figure 5) by P Allen & C P Green on behalf of Quaternary Scientific, University of Reading (QUEST)

Introduction

One geo-archaeological test-pit was put down at the site, sunk to *c*.4.5m below ground surface (Fig. 4). The excavation was undertaken using a JCB. The sediments were inspected in a similar fashion for each bucket load, with occasional longer periods to check over the spoil heap more thoroughly. Inspection was for flakes, artefacts and, in the lower parts, vertebrate remains as these had been recorded in nearby pits historically. The west side of the trial pit was described using standard procedures for recording unconsolidated sediment and peat, noting the physical properties (colour), composition (gravel, sand, clay, silt and organic matter), peat humification and inclusions (e.g. artefacts) (Fig. 5).

Results and Interpretation

The following sediment sequence was observed in the excavation (Fig. 5)

Spoil		
Buried modern soil		
Silty clay with occasional pebbles	?Colluvium	
Gravel, predominantly	Lynch Hill Gravel	Pleistocene
Silty sand	Lambeth Group	Tertiary

Particular attention was paid to the colluvium and the Lynch Hill Gravel as detailed below.

Colluvium (c. 0.60 to 1.40m below ground surface)

The amount of pebble sized material in the colluvium was limited, but could have included artefacts. Inspection of each bucket load failed to find any flakes or artefacts. The deposit was judged to be colluvial on the low gravel content and high amount of silt and clay, delivered to the site from the nearby slopes. Alluvial deposits usually contain a reasonably high content of medium as it is essentially river-borne. This was not the case here.

The Lynch Hill Gravel (c. 1.40 to 3.45m below ground surface)

The Lynch Hill Gravel was not a typical of a fluvial gravel in that the sand matrix contained more silt and clay than would be expected. This element was almost certainly derived from the clays, silts and sands of the Lambeth Group, either reworked very locally as the river passed over it or it may have been of colluvial origin moving downslope into the river. No flakes, artefacts or vertebrate remains were recorded.

The Lambeth Group comprised a fine sand with a mixture of clay.

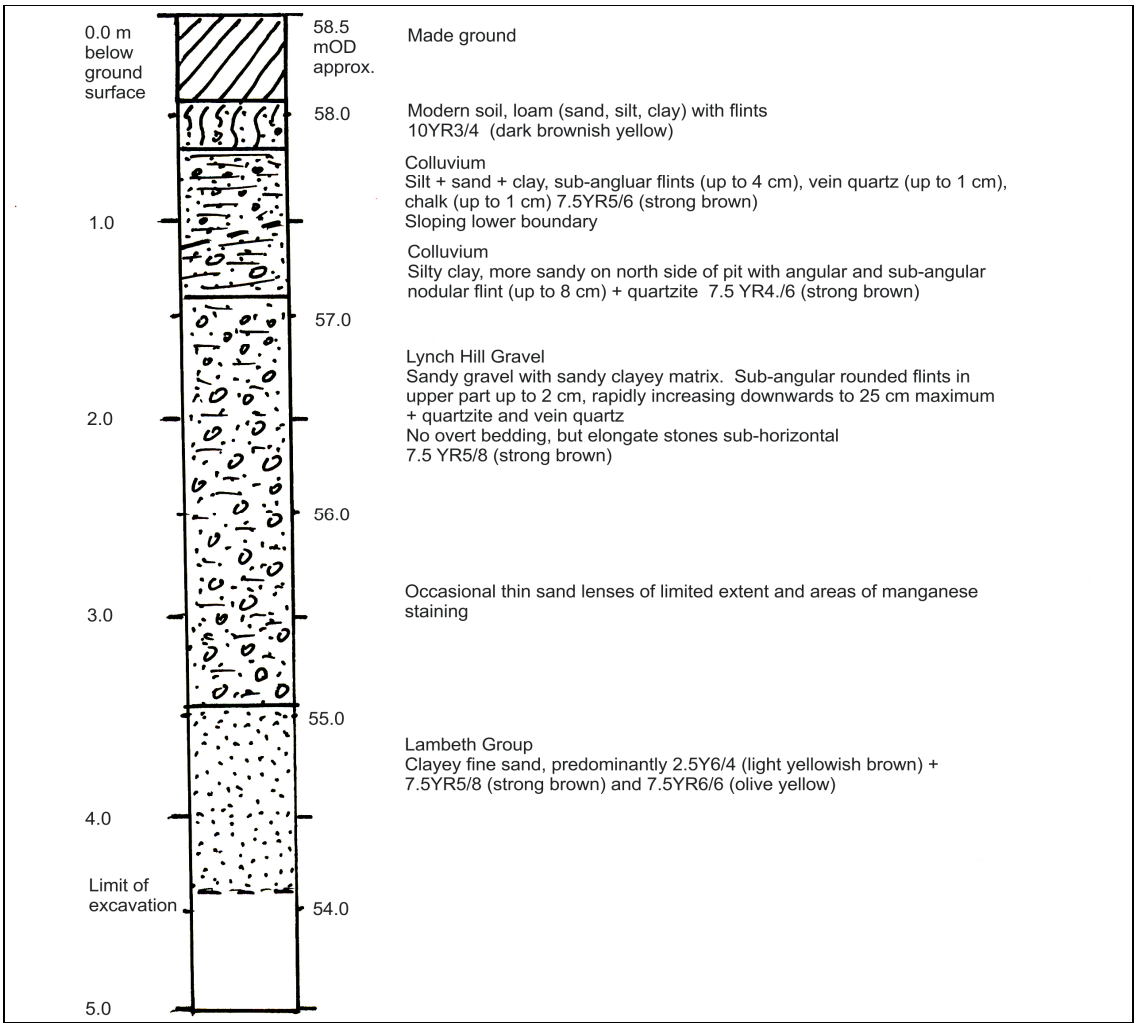

Figure 5: Sedimentary log of the west side of the geo-archaeological test-pit

Plate 5: General view of the geo-archaeological test pit

5. Conclusions

5.1 Three trial trenches were excavated across the development site, targeting the footprint of the proposed building. Excavation ceased in the trial trenches when the natural gravel strata was reached and no significant archaeological features or artefacts were present in the trenches in the material overlying the natural gravel.

5.2 The underlying natural deposits were sampled in the geo-archaeological test-pit. There is a reasonable possibility that further monitoring will produce lithics or, in the lowest gravels, maybe vertebrate material. However, as the colluvium and Lynch Hill Gravels are mediums of transport, had any artefacts or flakes been found, they would not have been in prime context, but derived. Derived artefacts/fauna would still add to the evidence from the Lynch Hill Gravel of the Middle Thames, although a small quantity of derived materials would be unlikely to fundamentally enhance our understanding.

5.3 There is of course a possibility within Pleistocene fluvial sequences, for *in situ* or only minimally disturbed material within fine-grained units within the gravels. Regular (relative to the rate of progress) monitoring of the development is therefore recommended. This will include further logging of sections/trenches to see if fine-grained sediments were occurring within the gravels, combined with limited sieving/checking of samples/soil heaps. Intensive sieving of the gravel deposits is not recommended given the probable derived nature of any artefacts that might occur, and the time/cost implications of such work.

5.4 The development site has been extensively truncated, probably during the construction of the detached house and former James Court building during 20th century (section 3.4). Any archaeological features of the late Prehistoric and later periods which may have been present, are likely to have been destroyed or extensively disturbed during these works.

5.5 The natural soil profile survived only in areas outside the footprint of the former building, at the west end of Trench 1 and the south end of Trench 3. Trench 2 within the footprint of the former building was sampled to a maximum depth of 1.2m but the underlying gravel was not reached indicating that the area within the former building has been extensively truncated.

5.6 Significant archaeological features of the late prehistoric and later periods were not observed in the trial trenches. While the existence of individual isolated features of these periods away from the trenches cannot be specifically excluded, it is unlikely that large numbers of such features or artefacts were present on the development site.

5.7 The results of the excavation of the geo-archaeological test-pit indicated that there is potential for the survival of material from the earlier prehistoric periods in the underlying natural strata.

5.8 *Confidence Rating*

The work was undertaken in fine weather conditions and full co-operation was received from the client and contractor. Accordingly, a high confidence rating is attached to the results of the evaluation.

6. Acknowledgements

The writer is grateful to Mike Walker for commissioning the evaluation on behalf of *Crest Nicholson (South) Ltd*. The assistance of Steve Binding and Kim Webster is also gratefully acknowledged. The project was monitored by Mary Neale BA MA MIFA (formerly O'Donoghue) of *Berkshire Archaeology* on behalf of the local planning authority.

The project was managed for *ASC Ltd* by David Fell BA MA MIFA. Fieldwork was led by Martin Cuthbert BA PIFA assisted by Gareth Shane BSc. Geo-archaeological advice was provided by the staff of QUEST, notably Rob Batchelor PhD, Bob Horsfield PhD and P Allen, who also undertook the excavation of the test-pit. The report was prepared by Gareth Shane and David Fell edited by Bob Zeepvat BA MIFA.

7. Archive

7.1 The project archive will comprise:

1. Project Design
2. Initial Report
3. Clients site plans
4. Site records
5. Site record drawings
6. List of photographs
7. B/W prints & negatives
8. Original specialist reports and supporting information
9. CDROM with copies of all digital files.

7.2 The archive will be deposited with *Reading Museum.*

8. References

Standards & Specifications

EH 1991 *The Management of Archaeological Projects, 2nd edition.* English Heritage (London).

EH 2002 *Environmental Archaeology: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Methods, from Sampling and Recovery to Post-Excavation.* English Heritage (London).

EH 2006 *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment.* English Heritage (London).

Fell D. 2010 *Project Design for Archaeological Evaluation on behalf of Crest Nicholson South.* Archaeological services and Consultancy Ltd document no. **1350/RJC/1**

IFA 2000a Institute for Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct.*

IFA 2000b Institute for Archaeologists' *Code of Approved Practice for the Regulation of Contractual Arrangements in Field Archaeology.*

IFA 2001 Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard & Guidance* documents *(Desk-Based Assessments, Watching Briefs, Evaluations, Excavations, Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings, Finds)*.

Secondary Sources

BGS *British Geological Survey 1:50,000 Series, Solid & Drift Geology.*

Appendix 1: Trench Summary Tables

Trench 1

Max Dimensions (m)					
Length	19.2	**Width**	2.5	**Depth**	0.7
Trench top W	58.0m OD				
Trench base W	57.4m OD				
Trench top E	58.0m OD				
Trench base E	57.3m OD				
NGR Co-ordinates					
SW	SU 6972 7250	**NE**	SU 6976 7252		
Orientation:	SW to NE				

Reason for Trench:	Evaluation of footprint of basement car park

Context	Type	Description and Interpretation	Width (max: mm)	Thickness (max: mm)	Depth (BGL: mm)
102	Layer	Mixed modern building debris. Remains of modern building	2.5m+	350	0
100	Layer	Soft mid yellow brown sandy silt. Confined to west end of the trench. Buried natural subsoil	2.5m+	350	*c.*200
101	Layer	Loose yellow orange silt, sand and gravel. Natural strata	2.5m+	250+	350

Trench 2

Max Dimensions (m)					
Length	20m	**Width**	2.5m	**Depth**	400mm
Trench top N	58.0m OD				
Trench base N	57.6m OD				
Trench top S	58.0m OD				
Trench base S	57.6m OD				
NGR Co-ordinates					
N	SU 6977 7250	**S**	SU 6977 7245		
Orientation:	N to S				

Reason for Trench:	Evaluation of footprint of new building

Context	Type	Description and Interpretation	Width (max: mm)	Thickness (max: mm)	Depth (BGL: mm)
200	Layer	Mixed mid brown silty clay with modern building debris. Sump excavated at south end. Modern building debris derived from the former James Court building	2.5m+	1.2m+	0

Trench 3

Max Dimensions (m)					
Length	16.5	**Width**	2.5	**Depth**	0.5
Trench top NE			58.0m OD		
Trench base NE			57.5m OD		
Trench top SW			58.0m OD		
Trench base SW			57.5m OD		
NGR Co-ordinates					
SW	SU 6976 7241		**NE**	SU 6978 7244	
Orientation:			SW to NE		

Reason for Trench:	Evaluation of footprint of new building

Context	Type	Description and Interpretation	Width (max: mm)	Thickness (max: mm)	Depth (BGL: mm)
302	Layer	Dark grey friable clay, with modern building debris. Modern building debris derived from the former James Court building.	2.5+	*c.*400	-
300	Layer	Dark grey friable clay, with modern building debris. Confined to the NE 1/3rd of trench. Modern building debris derived from the former James Court building	2.5+	100+	*c.* 400
301	Layer	Mid yellowish brown silt and gravel. Confined to the west part of the trench. Natural strata.	2.5+	Un-exc.	400

Appendix 2: List of Photographs

SITE NAME: James Court, Bath Road, Reading		**SITE NO/CODE: 1350 RJC**		**Acc n.o:**
Shot	Film/Neg	B&W	Digital	Subject
1	1/9	✓	✓	Trench 1 general shot from wsw end
2	1/8	✓	✓	Trench 1 general shot from wsw end
3	1/7	✓	✓	Trench 1 stratigraphy
4	1/6	✓	✓	Trench 3 general shot from ne end
5	1/5	✓	✓	Trench 2 general shot from n end

Appendix 3 ASC OASIS Form

PROJECT DETAILS			
Project Name:	James Court, Bath Road, Reading	OASIS reference:	archaeol2-97922
Short Description:	In March 2011 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken at James Court, Reading in order to inform proposals for the redevelopment of the site. Three trial trenches and one geo-archaeological test-pit were excavated. No significant archaeological features or artefacts were present in the trial trenches and the construction of the former James Court building is likely to have extensively disturbed or destroyed any late prehistoric and later features which may have been present. The results of the geo-archaeological test-pit indicate that deposits of the Lynch Hill gravel series survive on the development site and offer the potential for recovery of artefacts of the earlier prehistoric periods.		
Project Type:	Evaluation		
Previous work: (eg. SMR refs)	None	Site status: (eg. none, SAM, listed)	None
Current land use:	Former care home	Future work: (yes/no/unknown)	Unknown
Monument type:	N/a	Monument period:	N/a
Significant finds: (artefact type & period)	None		
PROJECT LOCATION			
County:	Berkshire	OS reference: (8 figs min)	SU 6977 7250
Site address: (+ postcode if known)	James Court, Bath Road, Reading		
Study area: (sq. m. / ha)	4200 Sq M	Height OD: (metres)	*c.*57 m OD
PROJECT CREATORS			
Organisation:	Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd		
Project brief originator:	-	Project design originator:	David Fell
Project Manager:	David Fell	Director/Supervisor:	Gareth Shane
Sponsor / funding body:	Crest Nicholson South		
PROJECT DATE			
Start date:	March 2011	End date:	March 2011
PROJECT ARCHIVES			
	Location (Accession no.)	Content (eg. pottery, animal bone, files/sheets)	
Physical:	Reading Museum	N/a	
Paper:		Project design, project report, clients plans etc	
Digital:		CD with all digital files	
BIBLIOGRAPHY (Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report)			
Title:	Archaeological Evaluation: James Court, Bath Road, Reading, Berkshire		
Serial title & volume:	ASC: 1350/RJC/2		
Author(s):	Gareth Shane BSc and David Fell MA MIFA		
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