

Summary

- *Pre-Construct Archaeological Services Ltd (PCAS) was commissioned by Mouchel Business Services, on behalf of The Peterborough School, to undertake an intrusive archaeological evaluation on land at The Peterborough School, Thorpe Road, Peterborough, Cambridgeshire.*
- *This work was undertaken to fulfil a condition attached to the granting of planning permission for the construction of a new sports hall (Planning application 11/00568/FUL).*
- *A single trench measuring 2.4m wide by 42.5m long was excavated within the footprint of the proposed new building. No deposits or features of archaeological significance were observed. However, fragments of medieval pottery, roof tile and animal bone were recovered from the sub-soil.*
- *Effectively, the negative results from the relatively large trench within the development area would suggest further investigation within this part of the site is unlikely to yield any more significant information. Although the presence of medieval pottery may indicate activity during this period nearby and a monitoring scheme covering the associated service trenching may prove informative.*

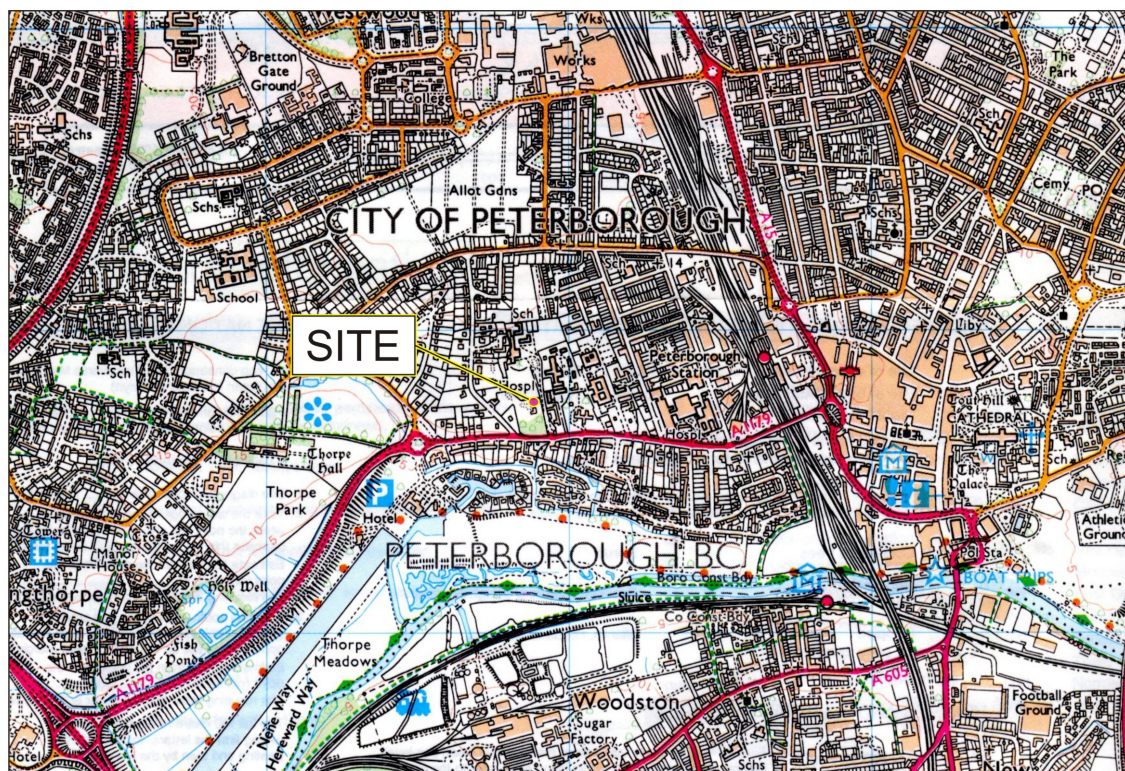


Fig. 1: Site location map. Scale 1:25 000
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1.0 Introduction

Pre-Construct Archaeological Services Ltd (PCAS) was commissioned by Mouchel Business Services, on behalf of The Peterborough School, to undertake an intrusive archaeological evaluation on land at The Peterborough School, Thorpe Road, Peterborough, Cambridgeshire (NGR: TF 1790 9872). Site works were undertaken by the author on the 14-15/7/11.

The archaeological evaluation was undertaken to meet the objectives of a project specification prepared by PCAS (2011) in consultation with Ms. Casa Hatton, the Peterborough City Council Archaeologist and in accordance with policy CS17 of the Peterborough Core Strategy (2011), the recommendations of *Planning Policy Statement 5, Policy HE6; Code of Conduct* (Institute for Archaeologists, 1994 as revised), *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluations* (Institute of Field Archaeologists, 2008 as revised).

2.0 Site Location and Description (Figs. 1 & 2 see Photograph No. 1)

The proposed development site is located within the City of Peterborough, c. 900m to the west of the city centre, and c. 300m north of the River Nene. It is situated to the north of Thorpe Road within the grounds of The Peterborough School, which has developed around Westwood House a former mid 19th century mansion house, set within its own grounds.

The location of the proposed new sports hall lies at the southern end of the existing sports/playing field. It is defined to the south and west by dense hedges and is flanked to the east by a gravel surfaced car park with the main tree lined entrance road beyond.

Topographically the site is positioned on the north bank of the valley of the River Nene, and there is a gentle slope southwards towards the river: the Ordnance Datum height of the site ranges from approximately 14.3m at its northern side to 13.0m at the southern side.

The British Geological Survey records no drift geology in the vicinity of the site. The solid geology is variable, as the site lies on or adjacent to a sequence of changes from Cornbrash to Blisworth Clay to Blisworth Limestone, occurring within a relatively small area (BGS 1984).

3.0 Planning Background

Full planning permission for the construction of a 600m² sports hall with storage and office space, viewing accommodation, a fitness suite and changing facilities for 60 people, to include a reorganisation of existing parking facilities and the provision of new cycle storage, was granted on 17/6/11 (planning application number 11/00568/FUL).

This permission was granted subject to the implementation of a programme of archaeological field evaluation works in accordance with policy CS17 of the Peterborough Core Strategy (2011), with any subsequent safeguarding measures that the findings of the evaluation showed to be necessary.

4.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

Human occupation and activity in the Peterborough area date back to the Bronze Age, when settlements such as Flag Fen, to the east of the city, arose on islands of firm ground within the wetlands of the Nene valley.

Two phases of a Roman fort at Longthorpe, c. 2.5km to the south-west of the site, were excavated between 1967 and 1973. The earlier fort appeared to have been a campaign fort covering some 27 acres, and may have been established as early as AD 44-48; it was succeeded by a smaller fort of some 11 acres, making use of existing structures, but there was only evidence of occupation up to about AD 61-2 (Pastscape, 2007).

The first settlement on the site of the city of Peterborough was a Saxon village called Medehamstede. An abbey was built here in c. AD 655, but in AD 870 it was plundered by Danish raiders and abandoned.

A new abbey was built in AD 972, and the walled settlement that grew up around it was known as 'St. Peter's burgh' (a 'burgh' being a fortified town). The early medieval town lay to the west of the abbey, but following a disastrous fire in AD 1116, the abbey was completely rebuilt and the abbot laid out a new, planned town to the west of it (Lambert, n.d.).

The proposed development site is located to the west of the historic town and c. 900m east of the Commonwealth-period mansion of Thorpe Hall. It is situated within the grounds of Westwood House, a Grade II listed mid 19th century mansion house, within suburbs which developed throughout the 19th and 20th century.

5.0 Aims and Objectives

The purpose of the evaluation is to gather sufficient information to establish the presence or absence, extent, depth, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits. Such information is used to assist the Local Planning Authority to reconcile development proposals within their own policy framework, policy CS17 of the Peterborough Core Strategy (2011), of safeguarding archaeological remains when at risk from development proposals and inform the need for any further archaeological intervention and take into consideration such things as sympathetic foundation designs with a view to minimising damage to archaeological deposits (mitigation) where appropriate.

6.0 Methodology

The trench was initially proposed to be 2m wide by 50m long, however, there was insufficient room between the fence along the edge of the car park at the east end of the site and the dense hedge at the west end of the site, and as such the trench length was reduced to 42.5m long although its width was increased to 2.4m wide to maintain the same surface area. The adjusted trench position was accurately located by offsetting from the site boundary and then opened using a JCB mechanical excavator fitted with a smooth blade down to the first archaeologically significant horizon/ the natural substrate. This was undertaken under constant supervision by the author. Unfortunately the machine driver, although proficient in removing the overburden in shallow spits, did frequently deviate from the original line of the trench, resulting in a curved, rather than straight trench. The trench was then hand cleaned.

No archaeological features or deposits were identified. Exploratory sondages were excavated into the silty deposits to confirm their natural origins.

Context sheets were completed for each deposit, and multi-context drawings were produced in both plan and section. Plans were recorded at 1:100, sections at 1:20, and these scales were sufficient to allow a comprehensive understanding of relationships to be made and to show the detail of features and deposits. Colour slide and digital photographs were taken to complement these accounts.

7.0 Results (Fig. 3, see Photographs Nos. 2-4)

The natural substrate (103) was encountered at c. 0.6m below the existing ground surface. This consisted of predominantly limestone brash, a mix of weathered limestone fragments within a light-mid orange-brown silt matrix. Veins/lenses of mid orange-brown sandy silt and grey orange-brown clay were also apparent. Sample sondages were excavated at three locations through the silt/clay deposits to confirm their natural origins. These were seen to be laminated bands of material all inclined gently down to the east, with the silts running underneath the brash. These natural variations were not further recorded.

The natural substrate (103) was sealed by mid orange-brown clayey silt sub-soil deposit (102) which contained frequent small limestone fragments. Three sherds of medieval pottery, spanning the late 12th – 15th century, a glazed roof tile fragment and several fragments of animal bone were also recovered from this layer (see Appendix 3).

Sub-soil (102) was sealed by up to 0.25m of loamy silt topsoil (101) which contained occasional small limestone fragments and charcoal flecks. A small amount of post-medieval pottery (see Appendix 3), glass, oyster shell and animal bone fragments were observed within this deposit, consistent with general domestic waste within this suburban environment.

8.0 Discussion and Conclusion

No archaeological features or deposits were observed within the evaluation trench and as such it would seem unlikely that any further work at this location would be useful. However, the presence of the medieval material within the sub-soil does suggest that activity during this period may have been taking place nearby. As such monitoring of service trenches leading away from this location may further inform this speculation.

9.0 Effectiveness of Methodology

The methodology employed was entirely sufficient to allow the investigation and recording of deposits exposed within the evaluation trench.

10.0 Acknowledgements

Pre-Construct Archaeological services Ltd would like to thank Estate Manager, Dave Thornton for his assistance with this project.

11.0 Bibliography

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Lambert, T., n.d., *A Brief History of Peterborough, Cambridgeshire*. Consulted 12/07/11 at <http://www.localhistories.org/peterborough.html>

Pastscape, 2007, *Longthorpe Roman Fort*. Consulted 12/7/11 at http://www.pastscape.org.uk/hob.aspx?hob_id=364099

12.0 Site Archive

The documentary and physical archive for this site is currently held by Pre-Construct Archaeological Services Ltd. This will be deposited at Peterborough Museum within six months of completion of this report under Accession No. PETMG 2011.072.