

BOTANIC GARDEN, CAMBRIDGE

An Archaeological Evaluation on the site of the proposed Sainsbury Laboratory



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Botanic Garden Cambridge

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Introduction

This archaeological evaluation was commissioned by Hannah Reed & Associates on behalf of Lynxvale Ltd. and the Gatsby Charitable Foundation to further define the archaeological potential of land within the Cambridge University Botanic Garden, Cambridge. Located to the south of Cambridge the Proposed Development Area (PDA) is bounded to the north by buildings along Bateman Street and to the east, south and west by the grounds of the Botanic Garden. The proposed development, centred on TL 4557 5728, comprises a Laboratory Building, Glasshouse Building, public café and garden facilities set within approximately 2ha, with the building element extending over c. 0.6ha within that area.

A previous desktop assessment examined the probability of archaeological remains occurring within the PDA by examining different sources of information detailing known areas or finds of archaeological interest in the vicinity (Dickens 2007). Detailed background is presented in that report and is not repeated here. The evaluation phase is intended to establish whether archaeology is actually present and if so to then characterise it in terms of type, date, and survival.

Methodology

Six trenches were excavated along the northern edge of the Botanic Garden between the 29th and 31st August 2007 (Figure 1). In addition to a 2m x 2m box, 35m of trench was opened, 4m of which was not bottomed due to a live service. Because of the limited space available, avoiding trees, upstanding physical obstacles and live buried services, 25m of the trenching was excavated at the width of a mini-digger bucket, 0.80m. Where space allowed, this was increased to double width, i.e. 1.60m.

Results

Trench 1

This was a north-south oriented trench and partially excavated, with a width of 0.80m, abandoned due to the presence of a modern plastic sewer/foul pipe.

Trench 2

This was an east-west oriented trench, 8.00m long and 0.80m wide, with live services lying to either side. The make-up of the trench consisted of 0.50m of topsoil and 0.25m of sandy subsoil, bottoming onto natural gravelly sand. No archaeology was encountered.

Trench 3

This was an east-west oriented trench, 8.00m long and 0.80m wide, with live services lying to either side. The make-up of the trench consisted of 0.40m of topsoil and 0.40m of sandy subsoil, bottoming onto natural gravelly sand. No archaeology was encountered.

Trench 4

This was a 2m x 2m square trench, with a make-up of 0.40m of topsoil and 0.30m of subsoil bottoming onto natural gravelly sand. No archaeology was encountered.

Trench 5

This was a north-south oriented trench, 10.00m long and 1.60m wide. The make-up of the trench consisted of 0.40m of compacted, gravel-capped ashy topsoil, and 0.15m of subsoil, bottoming onto natural gravelly sand. A small 19th century pit intruded into the natural, which was excavated but the finds of shell and ceramic were discarded. A potential feature was observed at the northern end, but excavation demonstrated that this was likely to be a natural hollow in the gravel.

Trench 6

This was an east-west trench 5.00m long and 0.80m wide. The makeup consisted of 0.35m of topsoil and 0.25m of subsoil, bottoming onto natural gravelly, silty sand. No archaeology was encountered.

Discussion

No features pre-dating the 19th century were uncovered. Evidence of horticultural activity was frequently seen intruding into the top of the subsoil but was not recorded. Only the single feature in Trench 5 penetrated as far as the natural gravel, and this was also clearly of a very late date. This result reinforces the previously held conclusion that the Roman activity associated with the *Via Devana* to the east, and the field systems to the south did not extend into this area (Cessford 2003), which subsequently became part of the agricultural hinterland of medieval and later Cambridge.

References

Cessford, C. 2003 *Cambridge University Botanic Garden: An Archaeological Evaluation* CAU Report **575**

Dickens, A. 2007 *Botanic Garden, Cambridge: An Archaeological Desktop Assessment of the site of the proposed Sainsbury Laboratory* CAU Report **772**



Figure 1: Botanic Garden Trench Locations