

South Hill Park Bracknell Berkshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



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South Hill Park Bracknell, Berkshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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Front cover: Southern terrace of main building

SUMMARY

On 1st December 2008, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief during geotechnical test pitting at South Hill Park, Bracknell, Berkshire (NGR: SU 870 667). The work was commissioned by Chris Blandford Associates in advance of the proposed construction of a disabled access ramp. A photographic record of the southern lake inlet wall was also undertaken at the same time. The watching brief revealed details of the construction of the south terrace walls and deposits of made ground associated with landscaping of the grounds. No other significant archaeology was observed.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 On the 1st December 2008 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at South Hill Park, Bracknell, Berkshire (NGR: SU 870 667). The work was commissioned by Chris Blandford Associates, in respect of a proposal to construct a new disabled access ramp onto the south terrace. Work was also carried out recording the walls at the southern lake inlet.
- 1.1.2 The excavation of the geotechnical test pits dug in order to investigate the construction of the south terrace wall had the potential to affect archaeological deposits and an archaeological watching brief was attached to the works.
- 1.1.3 OA produced a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) showing how it would meet the requirements of the watching brief (OA, 2008).

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 South Hill Park lies on the southern edge of the town of Bracknell (Fig. 1) and comprises a mansion, landscaped gardens including a southern terrace and an area of open park land including lakes occupying an area of c3.5 hectare. The northern lake and grounds slope gently to the north, while the southern grounds and lake are roughly level.
- 1.2.2 The underlying geology is alluvium over pebble gravel of the “Bagshot” series (Geological Survey of Great Britain sheet no. 269). The site lies at approximately 88 m OD.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

Summary

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared for the WSI for the project (OA, 2008) and is reproduced overleaf.

- 1.3.2 South Hill Park mansion is a red brick building, mostly now in Victorian style. It lies within the remnants of its original 800 acre park, which still holds two lakes.
- 1.3.3 The first house on the site was constructed in 1760, in Italianate style with a baroque tower and decorated with stucco. This house was enclosed in 30 acres of park. The house was altered at the turn of the 19th century in preparation for a change of ownership.
- 1.3.4 Towards the end of the 19th century the house was largely rebuilt following fire. The rebuild left the house as seen today, however, the original east wing was retained and incorporated into the new Lawrence mansion of brick and Bath stone.
- 1.3.5 Since the turn of the 20th century the house has been in the ownership of various bodies including the Royal Sea Bathing Hospital, and the BBC. The site became the present day Arts Centre in 1973.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To preserve by record any archaeological deposits or features that may be disturbed or destroyed during the course of this phase of ground works.
- 2.1.3 To provide information to determine a mitigation strategy for the main phase of construction.
- 2.1.4 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief was conducted as an archaeological presence during the hand excavation of the geotechnical pits adjacent to the terrace. The recording of the walls at the southern lake inlet was accomplished using a photographic survey.
- 2.2.2 A plan showing the location of the test pits and the extent of the walls at the southern lake was maintained at a scale of 1:100 and 1:500 respectively (Fig. 2). The recorded sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All excavations and any recorded sections were photographed using digital photography, colour slide and black and white print film and the photographic survey was accomplished similarly. A general photographic record of the work was also made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Field Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

Test Pit 1

- 3.1.1 This was located to the north of the west wall steps leading onto the south terrace (Fig. 2, Test Pit 1; Fig. 3, Section 1).
- 3.1.2 The underlying natural, an orange-brown sandy clay (12) was encountered at a depth of 0.5 m below the current ground level. This was overlaid by a 0.3 m deep layer of grey-brown clay silt (11), a probable alluvium layer. Cutting this deposit was a north-south linear feature, running parallel with the west wall of the south terrace (16). This cut was 0.95 m deep and had a vertical face and a flat base.
- 3.1.3 The bottom 0.8 m of this feature was filled with a compact masonry layer composed of small to medium sized sandstone fragments and lime mortar (14). Built upon this was a brick wall (13) whose bottom four courses were composed of red hand moulded bricks measuring 0.228 m x 0.105 m x 0.065 m. these were laid using lime mortar and English stretcher bond. The wall above these courses had been rebuilt using modern machine made red bricks. These measured 0.225 m x 0.115 m x 0.072 m and were laid using a cement mortar and English stretcher bond.
- 3.1.4 A light grey-brown clay silt (15) had been used to backfill the remainder of the foundation trench. This was sealed by a 0.22 m deep layer of dark brown clay loam (10), a landscaping layer of topsoil and turf.

Test Pit 2

- 3.1.5 This was located against the south wall of the south terrace midway between the two sets of steps (Fig. 2, Test Pit 2; Fig. 3, Section 2).
- 3.1.6 A layer of natural, a yellow-brown sandy clay containing numerous yellow flint pebbles (22) was encountered at a depth of 0.4 m below the current ground level. This was overlaid by a 0.15 m deep layer of grey-brown clay silt (21), a probable alluvial deposit similar to layer 11 in Pit 1. This was cut by an east-west running foundation trench (24), running parallel to the south wall of the terrace. This was 0.25 m deep and had a vertical face and a flat base. Poured within this cut was a weak concrete composed of pebbles, fragments of brick and lime mortar (23), 0.15 m deep. Built onto the top of this foundation was a brick wall (25) forming the southern edge of the terrace. This was built using red hand moulded bricks measuring 0.228 m x 0.105 m x 0.065 m laid in a lime mortar using English stretcher bond.
- 3.1.7 Overlying the footings and the alluvium was a 0.15 m deep layer of dark brown clay loam (20), which produced examples of modern coins (2 p pieces) and plastic, and which represents a modern landscaping layer.

Structural recording on the inlet of the south lake

- 3.1.8 The masonry comprising the inlet to the southern lake was composed of a stone wall enclosing the southern end of the lake, with a concrete pipe projecting out of its southern extent (Plate 1).
- 3.1.9 The stone wall was built using dressed sandstone blocks measuring on average 0.25 m x 0.18 m x 0.15 m. The wall consisted of 4 courses. The bottom 3 courses were laid using Flemish bonding, while the upper course was laid using the blocks on edge and running the width of the wall, the total height measuring 0.62 m. This was constructed on a concrete foundation which projected 0.2 m in front of the wall.
- 3.1.10 Because of silting it was impossible to determine the thickness of the concrete foundations.
- 3.1.11 The south wall ran round all three sides of the southern end of the lake. The wall flanking the west side was only 13.2 m long (Plate 2) while the wall on the eastern side was in excess of 70 m long. All construction seems to have been part of the same phase of work with a similar style of construction and materials being used throughout.
- 3.1.12 The wall is in a generally good state of repair, however within a 3 m long stretch of wall along the western edge of the lake, the concrete footing has partially subsided (possibly in the silts forming the sides of the lake) leaving the stone wall unsupported (Plate 2).

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 No dating evidence other than modern finds were recovered during the course of the watching brief. The presence of these artefacts was recorded but they were not retained.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were observed during the course of the watching brief.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 All the archaeologically significant deposits observed relate to the 18th-and 19th-century construction of the house or to the modern day use of the site. This can be accounted for by both the limited area exposed and the proximity of the test pits to the standing structures. The walls forming the water inlet of the southern lake are of probable 20th-century construction.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i> Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
Test Pit 1						
10	Layer	0.25 m	-	Topsoil and turf	-	C20th
11	Layer	0.25 m	-	Alluvial deposit	-	-
12	Layer	> 0.85 m	-	Bagshot Gravels	-	-
13	Wall	> 1 m	-	West wall of terrace	Brick	C18th/ C19th
14	Structure	0.75 m	-	Foundations for terrace wall	-	C18th/ C19th
15	Fill	0.25 m	-	Backfill of construction cut	-	C18th/ C19th
16	Cut	0.95 m	-	Construction cut for terrace wall	-	C18th/ C19th
Test Pit 2						
20	Layer	0.15 m	-	Topsoil and turf	Plastic, modern coins	C20th
21	Layer	0.25 m	-	Alluvial deposit	-	-
22	Layer	> 0.2 m	-	Bagshot Gravels	-	-
23	Structure	0.38 m	-	Wall foundations	Brick	C18th/ C19th
24	Cut	0.3 m	-	Construction cut	-	C18th/ C19th
25	Wall	> 1 m	-	South wall of terrace	Brick	C18th/ C19th

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

IFA, 2001 *Standards and Guidelines for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

OA, 2008 *South Hill Park, Bracknell, Berkshire: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

OAU, 1992 *Field Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson)

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: South Hill Park, Bracknell, Berkshire

Site code: BRSOHP 08

Grid reference: SU 870 667

Type of watching brief: Hand excavation of 2 test pits and structural recording of a standing wall and water inlet.

Date and duration of project: 1st December 2008, one day on site

Area of site: c5,000 m²

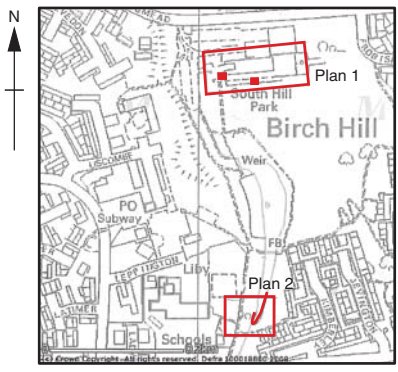
Summary of results: The watching brief observed deposits and structures relating to the 19th and 20th-century construction of the college and the landscaping of the grounds. No other significant archaeology was encountered.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS:2008.38

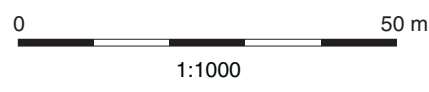
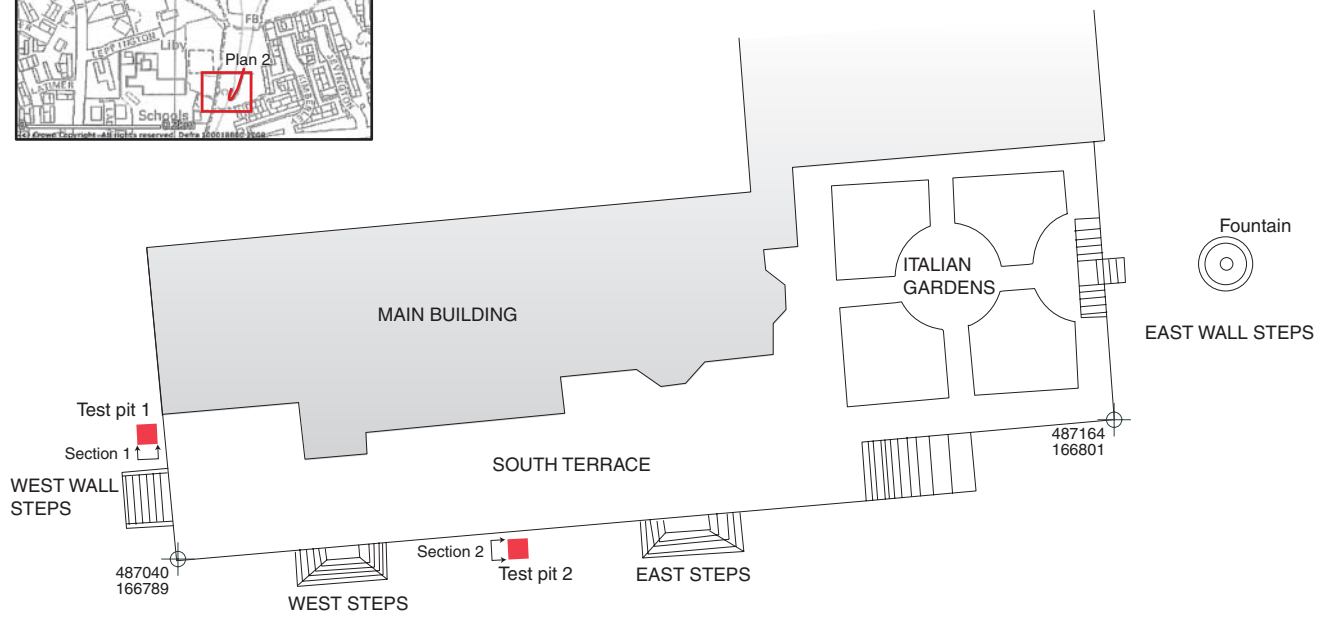


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Figure 1: Site location



Southern Terrace Ground Investigation Plan 1



Southern Lake Inlet Retaining Walls Plan 2

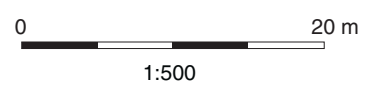
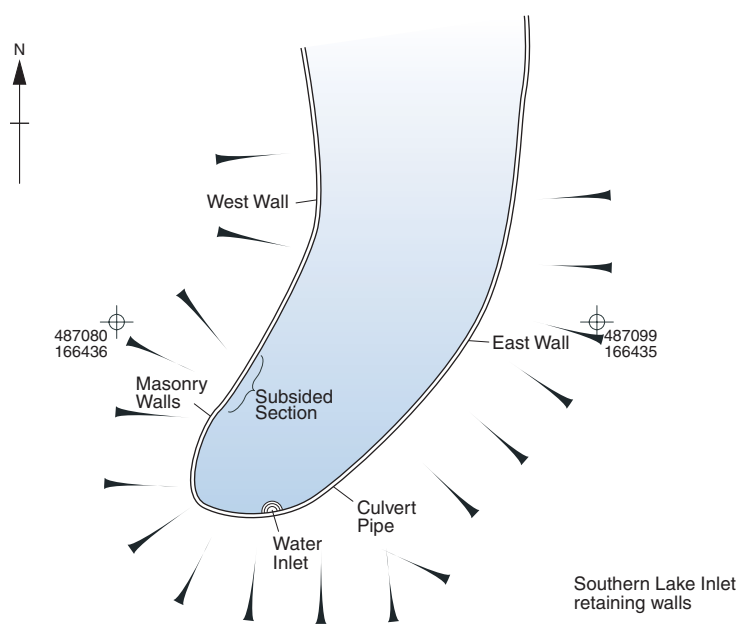
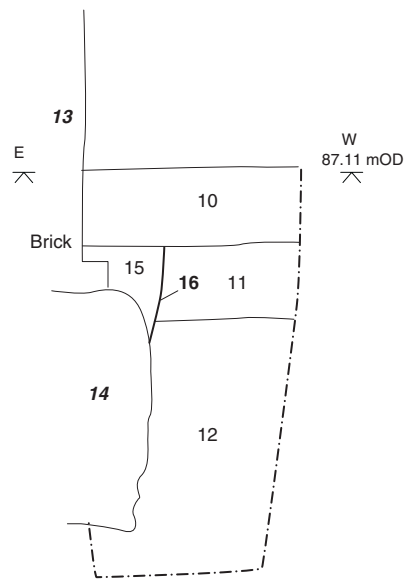


Figure 2 : Site plans

Test Pit 1 Section 1



Test Pit 2 Section 2

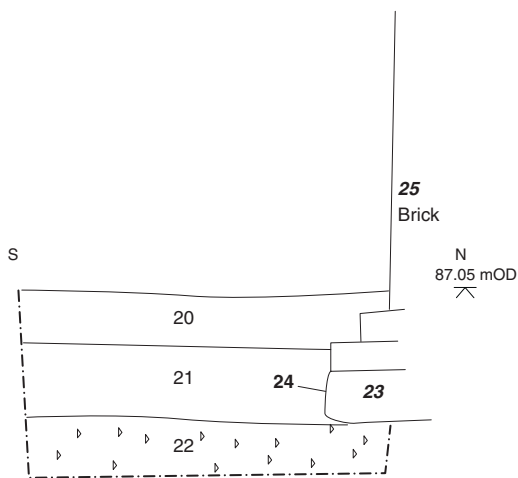


Figure 3 : Sections



Plate 1: Southern lake inlet and wall



Plate 2: West wall of Southern inlet, showing subsidence



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