

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD EVALUATION

AT

**LYON HOUSE,
CRADOCK ROAD, READING,
BERKSHIRE**

SU 7143 7160

On behalf of

*Norwich Union Linked
Life Assurance Ltd*

March 2004

FRONTSHEET

REPORT FOR: Norwich Union Linked Life
Assurance Ltd

PREPARED BY: Roy Entwistle

EDITED BY: John Moore

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ENQUIRIES TO: John Moore Heritage Services
Long White Cloud
Waterperry Road
Holton
Oxfordshire OX33 1PW

Telephone/Fax: 01865 876637
Email: jmhs@hotmail.com

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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION ON THE SITE OF LYON HOUSE, CRADOCK ROAD, READING

ABSTRACT

An archaeological evaluation was carried out on the site of the Lyon House, Cradock Road by John Moore Heritage Services in January 2004. The site is situated at the edge of the Kennet floodplain, a short distance from the Roman settlement at Rose Kiln Lane.

The work involved the machine excavation of three trenches through deep deposits of made ground, alluvium and peaty clay. Difficult working conditions prevented the full implementation of the evaluation. The completed trenches, however, failed to produce any archaeological finds or features.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Planning Background

A planning application was submitted to Reading Borough Council for the redevelopment of the Lyon House site for the flexible use of B1, B2 and B8 (Application No. 03/00763). The area affected by the proposed development scheme amounted to 1.03 hectares. Babcie Environmental advised the Borough Council that the site was potentially of archaeological interest, and for that reason a brief was issued for an archaeological evaluation.

In compliance with the terms of the brief, John Moore Heritage Services submitted a Written Scheme of Investigation setting out the methods for determining whether or not any archaeological remains survived on the site and establishing their significance in relation to the development proposal.

1.2 The Site and Archaeological Background

The site is situated on the northern side of Cradock Road at National Grid Reference SU 7143 7160 (Figure 1). It occupies a low-lying area at approximately 40 metres above Ordnance Datum, with a drift geology of alluvium overlying river gravels and the Reading Beds. Prior to the evaluation the Lyon House had been demolished leaving only the foundations and concrete building bases.

A geotechnical survey by Soil Consultants Ltd established that the development area had been made-up with variable clays, in places reaching a depth in excess of two metres. This overlay alluvial clay and clayey peat, which in turn rested on sand and gravel at depths between four and five metres.

The site lies a short distance from Rose Kiln Lane, where the discovery of building remains, tesserae and pottery were believed to represent a Roman villa, or large farmstead (Lobb and Rose 1996, 86). In view of the close proximity of the Roman

settlement, there was a likelihood that remains of the same period might be encountered during the ground-works for the development.

2 THE EVALUATION

2.1 Methods

The strategy for the fieldwork was set out in the Written Scheme of Investigation. It was to consist of the excavation by machine of three trenches, one measuring 70 metres in length, the second 40 metres and the third 15 metres in length. The two longer trenches were aligned north to south, and would be excavated in discontinuous sections, while the third trench was aligned east to west (Figure 2).

In view of the likely depth of deposits, baulks of approximately two metres were to be left in place to aid trench stability. After the recording of any archaeological remains, and monitoring by the Babbie representative, individual trench sections would be backfilled within a single day. Where access to the trench was needed to carry out any archaeological recording, provision was made for stepping back the trench sides. The excavation was to be carried out using a 360° machine fitted with a toothless grading bucket.

2.2 The Fieldwork

The evaluation was carried out over three days during January 2004. It soon became apparent that the depth of excavation needed to reach deposits underneath the alluvium posed a very real safety hazard. Even if the trench sides had been battered-back, flooding and the unstable conditions created by wet clay and the loose composition of the made-ground would prevent safe access to the trenches. In these difficult circumstances the recording of trench sections was limited to approximate measurements down the trench sides and a cursory description of the stratigraphy. No attempt was made to enter the trenches, and the search for archaeological material was restricted to an inspection of the individual spoil heaps.

Following a major collapse of the section in Trench 2, agreement was reached with the Babbie representative to curtail the evaluation. This decision was based not only on the safety issues, but also on the total absence of any archaeological finds or features in the four excavated trench units (Figure 2).

2.3 Results

In Trench 1 the three excavated sections were approximately two metres wide and 12 metres long. The stratigraphy in the most northerly unit (Figure 2, TR1a) closely matched the sequence of deposits recorded in boreholes 4 and 6 (ibid). A stiff brown to grey clay mixed with fragments of brick, chalk and flint extended to a depth of approximately 2.50 metres, below which a deposit of grey organic clay with lenses of peat was encountered. This extended to a depth of 4.20 metres where it rested on a loose sandy gravel which flooded rapidly. A similar sequence was recorded in the other sections of Trench 1 (Figure 2, TR1b and c), though with some variation in the

depth of peat, which reached 0.6 metres in the most southerly of the excavated sections.

The excavated unit of Trench 2 (Figure 2, TR2g) was machined to a maximum depth of 4.60 metres at the southern end and was stepped up to 2.00 metres at the northern end. Recorded from the surface, the stratigraphy consisted of made ground to a depth of 1.50 metres, which overlay a dark grey clay at 2.60 metres. At 3.30 metres, this gave way to a brown peaty clay incorporating twig-sized fragments of wood, which in turn rested on a greenish sandy clay. At 4.60 metres the trench flooded and a large part of the southern section collapsed.

No features were observed in the two trenches, and no finds of archaeological material was discovered during searches of the spoil heaps.

2.4 Conclusions

The made ground across much of the site appeared to consist of re-deposited London Clay mixed with building debris. This material was almost certainly imported from the clay heaps of the disused Whitley Brickworks, close by to the east. An inspection of the holes left by the removal of footings indicated that few if any of the foundations for the Lyon House had extended to a significant depth below the made ground.

The date of the alluvium and peat deposits is uncertain, but evidence from other parts of the Kennet Valley may provide a clue. Recent work at Anslow's Cottages, near Southcote, found evidence for floodplain inundation during the late Bronze Age. Other sites around Reading suggest that flooding and alluviation continued at intervals through the Roman period and beyond (Lobb and Rose 1996). This in itself may explain the lack of evidence for Roman settlement on the development site.

Although conditions during the evaluation prevented the full implementation of the fieldwork strategy, the negative results are likely to be an accurate reflection of the low archaeological potential of the development site. Settlements of the Roman period are commonly associated with dense and sometimes extensive scatters of pottery and other archaeological material. For that reason, the total lack of any such finds from the evaluation must indicate that settlement of the Roman period did not encroach on the development site. However, the floodplain margins might well have been exploited at various times, including the Roman period, for their seasonally available resources.

REFERENCES

Lobb, S. J., and Rose, P. G., 1996, *Archaeological Survey of the Lower Kennet Valley*, Wessex Archaeological Report, 9

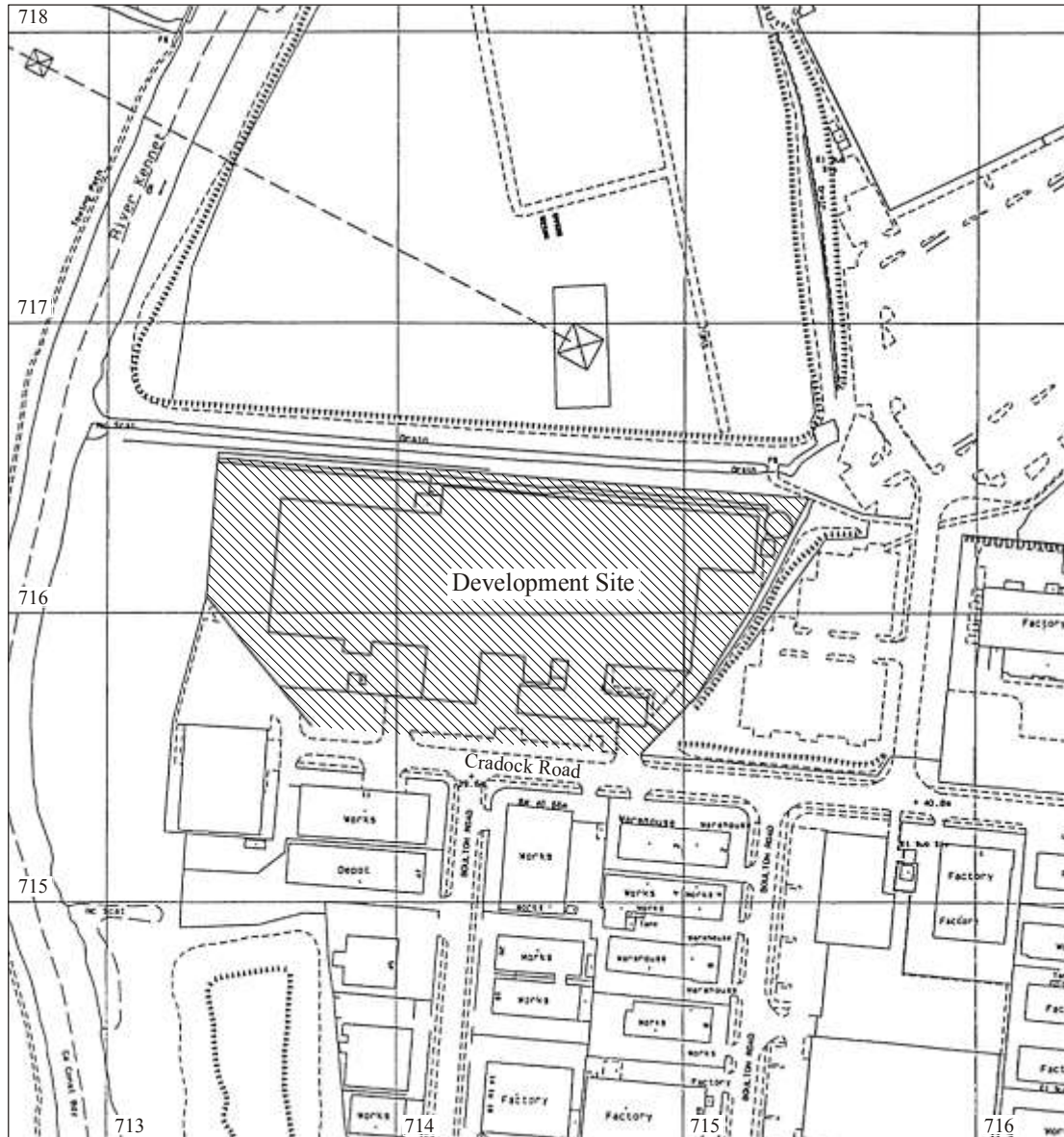


Figure 1: site location map (scale at 1 to 2500)

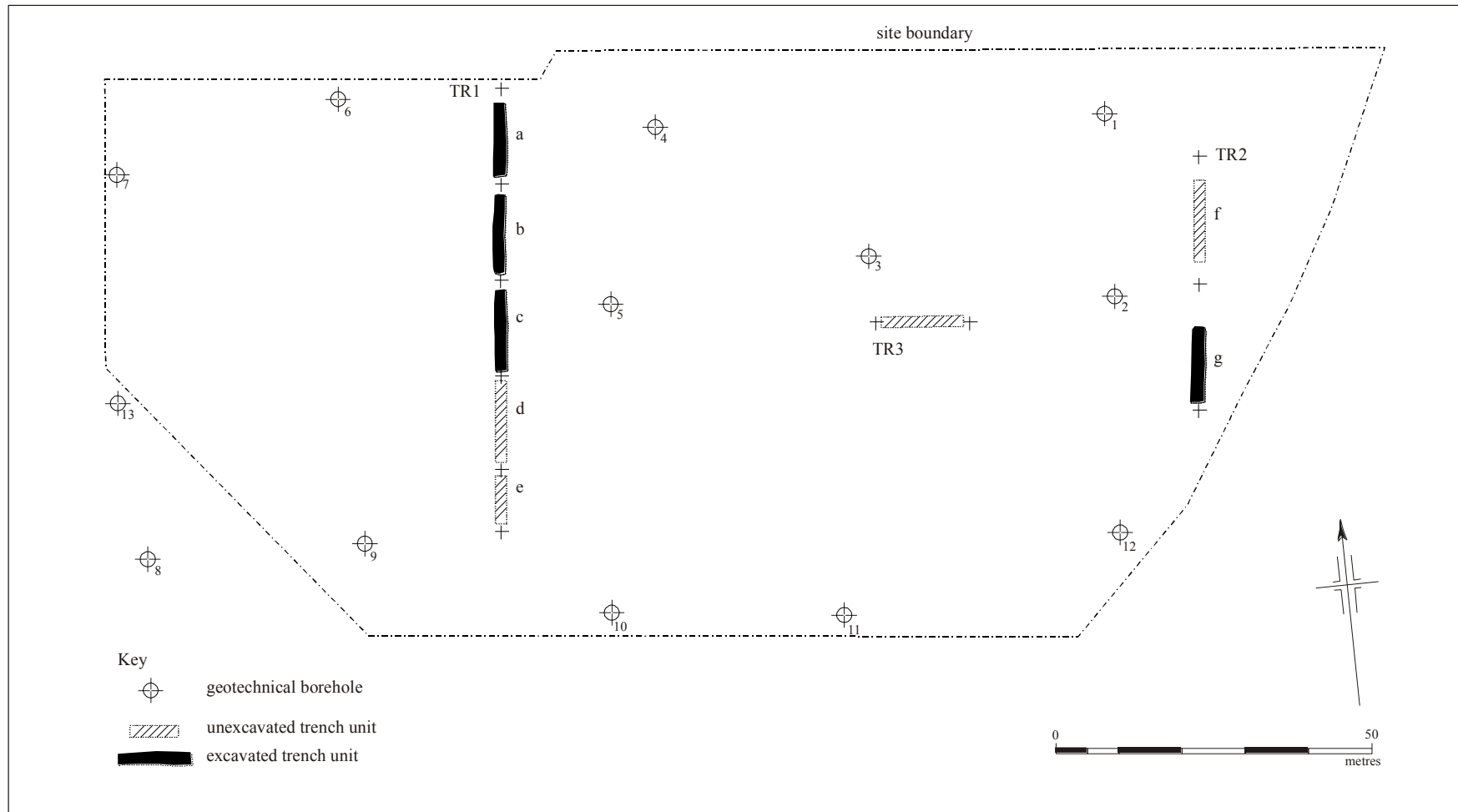


Figure 2: location of the evaluation trenches (borehole positions reproduced from a plan by Soil Consultants Ltd)