

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

PHASE 3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

AT

THE FORMER BERNWOOD FIRST SCHOOL SITE,

NORTH WAY, BARTON, OXFORD.

SP 5535 0780

On behalf of

Barratt Mercia

JULY 2004

REPORT FOR

Barratt Mercia
4-5 Elm Court
Copse Drive
Meriden
Coventry
CV5 9RG

PREPARED BY

John Moore

FIELDWORK

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ENQUIRES TO

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

Telephone/Fax 01865 876637
Email: jmhs99@hotmail.com

Site Code:

BABS 04

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Summary

A third phase of archaeological field evaluation took place as a condition of planning permission for redevelopment of the site of the former Bernwood First School, Barton, Oxford. No further archaeological remains were found in south-western half of the site.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The site is located on the northern side of North Way in Barton, Oxford (NGR SP 5535 0780). The published 1:50,000 geological map of the area (Sheet 237) indicates that the site is underlain by Beckley Sand Member of the Corallian Formation, which comprises sands and calcareous sandstone. The site lies at approximately 95-97m OD. The school buildings had been demolished just prior to the evaluation.

1.2 Planning Background

Oxford City Council has granted planning permission for the erection of 115 dwellings. Due to the potential for archaeological remains to be present on the site, a condition requires for a programme of archaeological work to be carried out. Previously the northern part of the site was subject to an evaluation. The Archaeological Officer of Oxford City Council indicated that the southern part also should be evaluated.

John Moore Heritage Services (JMHS), in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (JMHS, 2004) approved by OCC, carried out the works.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The line of the Dorchester to Alchester Roman road lies less than 500 m to the east of the investigation site. Flanking the road and lying some 300-400 m east of the school is an area of extensive Romano-British occupation. The evidence for this, as derived from the County Sites and Monuments Record, is as follows:

- PRN 3664 (SP 5578 0780 centred): During development in 1946 extensive traces of Romano-British occupation were found including inhumations, coins, and Samian and coarse ware pottery dating mainly to 3rd and 4th centuries AD. Building plans were not recovered, but this was due to the nature of the building operations and the very limited form of archaeological investigation.
- PRN 3665 (SP 5571 0776): During development in 1946 an undated human skeleton was discovered with no associated finds. It is likely to be related to the extensive occupation evidence cited under PRN 3664.

- PRN 3666 (SP 5590 0777): Found in 1949 east of the Roman road, a Romano-British cremation burial in an urn of greyware, together with a whetstone and the iron head of a small pick. Dated to the 1st or early 2nd century AD.
- PRN 3668 (SP 5580 0780): Iron Age pottery recorded on OS cards.
- PRN 3802 (SP 550 078): About 200 m to the west of the proposal site, in 1931 a single Anglo Saxon inhumation was discovered. This unaccompanied burial was allegedly found at the base of a sunken featured building, which contained Anglo Saxon pottery.

An initial phase of archaeological evaluation comprising geophysical survey was undertaken in October 1998 within the proposal area (Stratascan, 1998). This consisted of both a magnetometer and resistivity survey. Both surveys produced evidence of below ground anomalies. The anomalies M3 and M4, while being of possible modern origin, were closely aligned on a linear feature M5 that had the characteristics of an archaeological feature. A complex set of roughly linear anomalies (R1) was considered to be geological.

A current evaluation at the site of the former Fox Public House, c. 160m to the southeast, has failed to find evidence of Roman occupation suggesting that the settlement does not extend this far south along the line of the Roman road.

As part of the ground investigation of the site, a review of old Ordnance Survey plans (1879/81, 1899, 1921, 1936/7, 1956 and 1988) at 1:1250 and/or 1:2500 scales was undertaken (GSP 2001). These indicate that the site had not previously been developed; the school buildings are the only buildings to be shown on the site, which first appeared on the 1956 edition, essentially as existing. Prior to this the site was shown as open fields traversed by a footpath.

An archaeological field evaluation carried out by JMHS in January 2002 comprised a 3% sample of the site, not occupied by buildings and hard surfaces, and involved machine dug trenches and hand excavation of features. The only significant feature found was a burial pit, which was an irregular oval in plan. The pit was shallow, surviving up to 220mm deep. The burial was immediately under the topsoil and turf, and had been heavily disturbed by the landscaping for the school playing field (JMHS 2002). Carbon 14 dating of a sample of the human bone showed that the burial dated to between 20AD and 240AD (95.4% probability).

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the Written Scheme of Investigation were as follows:

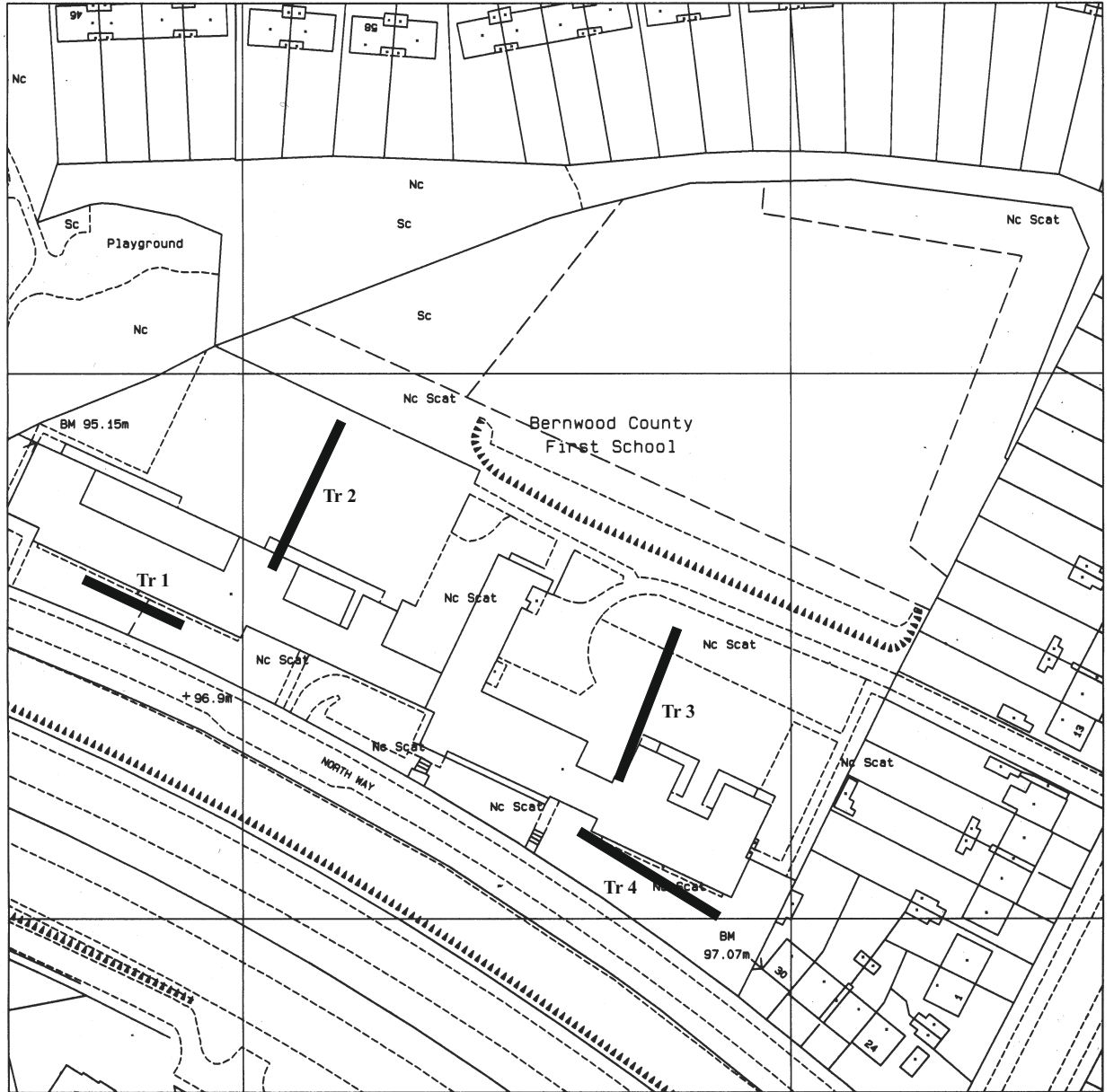
- To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the site.

207868m

078

077

207668m



553

554

455257m

455457m

Scale 1:1250

- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered.
- To assess the ecofactual and environmental potential of the archaeological features and deposits.
- To determine the impact of the proposed development on any remains present.
- In particular to establish whether remains associated with the local Roman pottery industry are present on the site.
- To make available to interested parties the results of the investigation subject to any confidentiality restrictions.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

A scheme of investigation was designed by JMHS and agreed with OCC and the applicant. The work was carried out by JMHS and involved the excavation of four trenches.

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the *Written Scheme of Investigation*. The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994).

3.2 Methodology

The field evaluation comprised the excavation of four trenches. The trenches varied in length from 20 to 29m and all trenches were 1.6m wide.

The trenches were excavated using a JCB equipped with a 5 foot wide ditching bucket. Trenches were excavated down to the natural geology under direct archaeological control. Potential features present were sampled by hand excavation.

Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and sections drawings compiled where appropriate.

Brian Durham of OCC monitored the works.

4 RESULTS

Deposits and fills are referred to in the text and figures in brackets: (102), cut features are numbered in square brackets: [204]. 100 numbers refer to contexts in Trench 1, 200 numbers in Trench 2, etc.

Trenches 1 and 4 were located adjacent to North Way in areas where school buildings had not been present. Trenches 2 and 3 were positioned further north in areas that had previously been playgrounds or car parking areas.

Trench lengths were as follows: Trench 1 – 20m, Trench 2 – 29m, Trench 3 – 29m, Trench 4 – 29m.

The natural deposits of Beckley Sands were exposed in all trenches (102, 201, 301, 402).

Within Trench 1 the natural was overlaid by a subsoil deposit of orange-grey sandy silt (101) some 200mm thick and within Trench 4 a deposit of mid grey-brown sandy silt loam with 01% small limestone fragments (401), 170mm thick covered the natural. The uppermost deposit (150-180mm thick) in both trenches was grass and topsoil comprising light grey-brown sandy silt (100, 400).

In Trench 2, overlying the natural was 250mm of material deriving from the demolition and comprising sandy silt and silty clay with frequent demolition debris (200). The uppermost deposit in Trench 3 was a disturbed subsoil of mid grey-brown sandy silt loam with occasional limestone fragments (300). This was 350mm deep.

5 FINDS

There were no finds other than debris from the demolition of the school buildings.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The original land sloped down northwards from North Way and the site has been terraced for the school buildings, playgrounds and parking areas, and further to the north for the playing field. The existing ground level for Trench 1 was between 96.14 and 96.39m OD, and 95.96 and 96.10m OD for Trench 4. The southern ends of Trenches 2 and 3 were at a height of 93.99 and 95.42m OD respectively while the northern ends were at 93.58 and 94.41m OD.

Even though the site has been terraced it can be stated with confidence that the Roman settlement did not extend this far. No features or artefacts were present in this part of the site confirming the results of the earlier evaluation on the playing field. The recent evaluation at the site of the former Fox public house failed to produce evidence for the settlement, which appears to not to extend so far south along the line of the Roman road. The burial found towards the north-east corner of this site again indicates that the area is outside of the settlement as burial usually did not occur within settlement areas. The burial pit lies on what is thought to be a false crest on the valley side. If the landscape had been open and the burial had been marked in some way then its position would have been visible from some considerable distance and certainly from the known Roman settlement.

The lack of Roman pottery from this site also suggests that the area was not being used for agricultural practises.

7 CONFIDENCE RATING

The work was carried out in dry, sunny conditions after demolition works had been carried out. Any cut features present would have been observed easily truncating the natural geology.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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