

**The Dahl Museum**  
**81-83, High Street, Great Missenden**  
**Buckinghamshire**

***Archaeological Watching Brief on Soil Test Pits***

NETWORK ARCHAEOLOGY LTD  
on behalf of  
PRICE AND MYERS  
for  
THE ROALD DAHL MUSEUM AND LITERATURE CENTRE

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## SUMMARY

Twelve soil test pits, each measuring less than a metre square at the surface and up to *c.*2m deep, were excavated in advance of demolition and refurbishment works at 81-83, High Street in the historic core of Great Missenden in Buckinghamshire.

Test pits in the workshops at the east end of the courtyard showed made ground to a depth of *c.*2m, suggesting the presence of a backfilled chalkpit. Investigations around the north range indicated a mid to late nineteenth century date for the upstanding walls and identified site levelling deposits from the same period. Test pits in and around the south range showed that the upstanding walls dated from the nineteenth century and revealed the remains of a late eighteenth or early nineteenth century wall footing below the present south wall.

# **1 INTRODUCTION**

This report was produced on behalf of Price and Myers, acting for the Roald Dahl Museum and Literature Centre, for an archaeological watching brief on a series of soil test pits at 81-83, High Street, Great Missenden, Buckinghamshire.

The archaeological work was carried out on the 7th of November 2002, as a condition of planning permission (00/719) relating to a proposal to convert the premises into The Dahl Museum.

## **2 BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 Location and topography**

The Proposed Development Area (PDA) was located on the east side of Great Missenden's High Street, on the south west side of a small tributary valley of the River Thames, at *c.* 125m AOD (448950 E 220110 N) (figure 1).

### **2.2 Geology and soils**

The PDA is situated over a (calcareous) fine silty soil (*Charity 2*) derived upon Valley Gravel overlying Middle Chalk (BGS 1946) (SSEW 1983).

### **2.3 Description of the Proposed Development Area (PDA)**

The site was reached via a covered carriageway. This opened onto an east - west oriented courtyard which measured approximately 20m by 10m.

Along the north side of the courtyard there were offices to the west and a hall at the east. At the eastern end there were modern single storey workshops.

On the south side of the courtyard there was a double height cartshed to the east, a large stable at the centre and a smaller stable to the west.

### **2.4 Archaeological and historical background**

No previous archaeological fieldwork had been carried out on the site.



### **3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of the archaeological watching brief are stated in the brief prepared by Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service.

The broad purpose of the watching brief was to identify and record any archaeological remains revealed by the test pits. Particular regard was to be paid to the potential for medieval and post-medieval remains.

## **4 PROCEDURES**

### **4.1 Survey**

The test pits were located to sub-metre accuracy by hand measuring from fixed points on buildings and plot boundaries.

### **4.2 Test pits**

Twelve test pits (1 - 12) were arranged around the courtyard and within the outbuildings. These were excavated by the site contractors under archaeological supervision. Each pit was hand dug until solid geology was reached. Where the overburden was too deep to be removed by hand, an auger was used to determine the depth of the solid geology. Test pits 8 and 9 were augered. In some instances the upper layer was concrete which had to be broken out mechanically.

### **4.3 Hand Excavation and Recording**

The spoil was visually searched for archaeological finds. Significant archaeological deposits were investigated and a written, drawn and photographic record made, in accordance with the brief. Stratified finds were retained, washed and then examined by appropriate specialists. Potentially significant unstratified finds were also recovered.

### **4.4 Standards**

All work has been undertaken in accordance with current health and safety legislation and in line with the Institute of Field Archaeologists’:

- *Code of Conduct* (2000)
- *Code of Approved Practice for the Regulation of Contractual Arrangements in Field Archaeology* (2000)
- *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluation* (1999)
- *Standard and Guidance for Finds and Ecofact Studies and Curation* (1999)
- *Guidelines for Finds Work* (1999)

The management of the project was in accordance with '*Management of Archaeological Projects*', second edition (English Heritage, 1991). Network Archaeology Ltd. is a *Registered Archaeological Organisation* with the *Institute of Field Archaeologists* (IFA).

## 5 RESULTS

### 5.1 Summary of stratigraphy by test pit

#### Test Pit 1

*Figures 2 and 3*

*Measurements: 0.50m x 0.50m x 1.20m deep*

This test pit was excavated in the angle of the rear and partition walls in the south corner of the small stable. Beneath the granite sett floor (100) was a metre-deep site levelling layer (101) overlying the natural clay with flints (001).

The levelling layer (101) was cut by the foundation trench (103) for the south east wall of the stable (107). Wall 107 was built of brick in stretcher bond on a substantial brick foundation plinth (106) and was abutted by a brick partition wall (109). Wall 109 was built in English bond on a brick rubble foundation (108) within construction cut 102. Both walls were founded on the natural clay.

The granite sett floor (100) was seen throughout the building and post-dated the walls.

Three fragments of post-medieval ceramic building material were recovered from context 101.

#### Test Pit 2

*Figures 2 and 4*

*Measurements: 0.40m x 0.40m x 0.76m deep*

This test pit was excavated in the courtyard against the north west wall of the small stable. The modern asphalt yard surface with rubble make-up (200) abutted the wall. Beneath the asphalt surface and its rubble make-up (200) was a 0.3m deep site levelling layer (203) which overlay the natural clay with flints (001).

Fairly shallow brick rubble wall foundations (204) were built on levelling layer 203. There was no obvious cut for the footings. Another possible levelling layer (202) abutted these foundations. The north wall (205) of the stable which stood upon these footings was built of brick in an irregular Flemish bond.

No artefacts were recovered.

#### Test Pit 3

*Figures 2, 4 and 5*

*Measurements: 0.80m x 0.50m x 0.88m deep*

This test pit was excavated in the angle of the rear and partition walls in the south corner of the large stable. A granite sett floor (300) seen throughout the building, post-dated the walls. Beneath the granite sett floor (300) was a site levelling layer (301) 0.3m deep. Below this lay the natural clay with flints (001).

### *Phase I*

A remnant foundation (307) consisting of a single course of large limestone blocks could be seen in the south section of the test pit. It stood on layer 301 and was abutted by a possible levelling layer (302). It represented an early phase of building upon which the present south wall (310) was founded.

### *Phase II*

A construction cut (303) had exposed the top of the limestone foundations (307) and a consolidation layer of mortar with flints (308) had been applied. Upon this stood a header bond brick plinth foundation (309). This plinth (309) was 0.10m wider than the limestone foundation (307) but followed a similar alignment. Foundation 309 supported the present south wall of the stable (310) which was built of brick in stretcher bond.

### *Phase III*

Wall 310 was abutted by a north west – south east oriented brick partition wall (312) in English bond on a shallow brick rubble foundation (311) within construction cut 305.

No artefacts were recovered.

## **Test Pit 4**

*Figures 2 and 5*

*Measurements: 0.60m x 0.60m x 1.00m deep*

This test pit was excavated in the courtyard against the north west wall of the large stable. A modern asphalt yard surface over a concrete slab (400) abutted the wall. Beneath the asphalt were three make-up or levelling layers (401, 402 and 403) with a total depth of 0.48m. Below these lay the natural clay with flints (001).

Foundation trench 404 cut through layers 401, 402 and 403, exposing the natural clay. A thin brick rubble levelling fill (406) was laid at the base of the trench and a brick foundation plinth (407) was built on this. The north wall of the stable (408) stood on this plinth. Both the plinth (407) and the wall (408) were built in Flemish bond.

No artefacts were recovered.

## **Test Pit 5**

*Figures 2 and 6*

*Measurements: 0.70m x 0.50m x 1.00m deep*

This test pit was excavated in the angle of the south east and south west walls in the south corner of the cartshed. A modern concrete slab floor with rubble make-up (511) abutted the walls. Beneath this was a metre-deep site levelling layer (500) which overlay the natural clay with flints (001).

### *Phase I*

Foundation trench 501 cut through layer 500, exposing the natural clay. A brick rubble levelling fill (505) was laid at the base of the trench. A two course

brick footing (506) in stretcher bond was built on this, followed by knapped flint and mortar in rough courses (507) all forming the south east wall of the cartshed.

### *Phase II*

The south east wall was abutted by the English bond brickwork of the south west wall (510). The construction trench (503) for wall 510 was cut through the levelling layer (500). The foundation plinth consisted of a single course of header bond brick (509) over a brick rubble and concrete footing (508).

Unstratified artefacts recovered from the spoil heap (512) dated from the mid to late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Test Pit 6**

*Figures 2 and 7*

*Measurements: 0.50m x 0.50m x 0.94m deep*

This test pit was excavated in the courtyard against the east wall of the hall. A modern asphalt yard surface over a concrete slab (600) abutted the wall. Below this, a site levelling layer (604) overlay the natural clay with flints (001).

Levelling layer (604) was cut by a construction trench (603) containing the substantial foundations of the east wall. At the base of the trench was a layer of compacted chalk and flint (602). This was overlain by brick rubble and flint in mortar (601) above which lay large flint cobbles in mortar (605). A brick footing comprising two courses of header bond (606) formed the base of the wall followed by knapped flint and mortar (607) for the main body of the east wall.

No artefacts were recovered.

### **Test Pit 7**

*Figures 2 and 7*

*Measurements: 0.50m x 0.60m x 0.60m deep*

This test pit was excavated in the courtyard against the south wall of the office building. A modern concrete yard surface (700) abutted the wall. Below this, the ground had been disturbed by the construction of the south wall and by the insertion of a ceramic drain (701) running through the southern half of the test pit. The natural clay with flints (001) was found 0.6m below ground level.

The construction cut (702) for the south wall of the offices contained trench built plinth foundations consisting of concreted brick rubble (704) bedded onto the natural clay and topped with a footing of a single course of frogged brick in header bond (705). The lowest two courses of the south wall (706) showed below concrete pebbledash, and were of brick in stretcher bond.

The backfill (703) of construction cut 702 produced finds dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century or later.

### **Test Pit 8**

*Figures 2 and 8a*

*Measurements: 0.36 m x 0.36m x 1.10m deep*

This test pit, was excavated in the open floor at the west side of the workshop. A concrete slab floor (800) was constructed on a sandy rubble make-up (801) laid over made ground (802). No natural deposits were found.

No artefacts were recovered.

### **Test Pit 9**

*Figures 2 and 8b*

*Measurements: 0.40m x 0.40m x 2.05m deep*

This test pit was excavated in the open floor at the east side of the workshop. A concrete slab floor (900) was laid directly over a layer of made ground (901) 1.91m deep. Below this lay the solid natural chalk.

Small fragments of 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> century glass and china were recovered from 901.

### **Test Pit 10**

*Figures 2 and 9a*

*Measurements: 0.50m x 0.50m x 1.08m deep*

This test pit was excavated in the open yard behind the east end of the hall, 0.43m from the rear wall. A modern asphalt yard surface with crushed concrete make-up (1002) overlay a site levelling layer (1001) 0.26m deep. Below this was a buried soil layer (1000) 0.66m deep and overlying the natural clay with flints (001).

No artefacts were recovered.

### **Test Pit 11**

*Figures 2 and 9b*

*Measurements: 0.50m x 0.50m x 3.10m deep*

This test pit was excavated in the open yard behind the east end of the hall. A modern asphalt yard surface with a clinker make-up (1102) overlay a site levelling layer (1101) 0.29m deep. Beneath this there was a buried soil layer (1100) 0.64m deep overlying the natural clay with flints (001).

No artefacts were recovered.

### **Test Pit 12**

*Figures 2 and 9c*

*Measurements: 0.9m x 0.5m x 1.08m deep*

This test pit was excavated in the open yard behind the east end of the hall. A modern asphalt yard surface with crushed concrete make-up (1200) overlay made ground layers (1201 and 1202) with a total depth of 0.42m. Beneath these was a buried soil layer (1203) 0.5m deep and overlying the natural clay with flints (001).

Layer 1203 was cut by trench 1205, which contained a box drain (1204). This was 0.25m square, built of frogged brick and ran east - west through the northern half of the test pit, draining down to the east.

Unstratified artefacts were recovered from the spoil heap (1206); willow pattern china and an iron object, possibly a tanged implement such as a trowel or handfork. A brown glaze rimsherd was recovered from layer 1201.

## 5.2 Artefacts

A summary of the artefacts found is provided in table 5.1 below.

**Table 5.1: Summary finds quantification table**

test pit	feature no.	context no.	pottery		ceramic building material		glass		iron	
			count	weight (g)	count	weight (g)	count	weight (g)	count	weight (g)
1	-	101			3	1967				
5	-	512	4	167			1	337		
7	702	703	1	14			1	1		
9	-	901	1	3			3	4		
12	-	1201	1	48						
12	-	1206	1	36					1	42
<b>totals</b>			<b>8</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1967</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>342</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>42</b>

## **6 DISCUSSION**

### **6.1 Archaeological remains within the test pits**

A range of deposits was recorded within the test pits, including drains, wall foundations and dumped material used to level the ground. These site levelling layers were discovered in most of the test pits and were apparently introduced to even out a natural, moderately steep slope down to the east.

Evidence from the test pits around the office block and hall of the north range suggested that the site levelling in this area took place during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the walls here date from the same period (see test pits 6 and 7). Pottery and ceramic evidence from the foundation trench of the office block's south wall indicated a date in the 19<sup>th</sup> century or later (see test pit 7).

Test pits 8 and 9, within the workshops at the east end of the courtyard showed made ground to a depth of *c.*2m over solid chalk geology with no intervening drift in the form of clay with flints, as seen elsewhere, suggesting the presence of a backfilled chalk pit. Artefact evidence from 901 suggested a late 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century date for the backfilling of this postulated chalk pit.

The test pits in and around the south range showed that the present south wall dated from the early to mid nineteenth century and stood on the limestone block footings of an earlier wall which was aligned with the southern property boundary (see test pit 5). These foundations probably belonged to a substantial building adjoining this property boundary to the south. This postulated building may date from the late 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century, based on the evidence of unstratified finds of this date found within the upcast of test pit 5.

In the north east corner of the site, a rusted building or decorating tool was found in a 19<sup>th</sup> century context within test pit 12. The same test pit also produced a paint-stained fragment of 18<sup>th</sup> century pottery. These finds raise the possibility that there were Victorian workmen on the site using an old vessel as a paint pot.

### **6.2 Potential archaeological remains on the site**

All the material recovered during test pit excavation was post-medieval or later in date. Earlier archaeological deposits could have been truncated by chalk quarrying or buried by the 19<sup>th</sup> century site levelling, but might survive to a varying extent on any part of the site.

The site lies in what is thought to be an area of medieval burgage plots in the heart of Great Missenden and although no medieval material was found in the small sample provided by the test pit excavations, remains of this date may survive on the site. The greatest potential for the survival of medieval remains is in the area adjacent to the High Street where the ground is higher and, unlike the eastern part of the site, there is no evidence to suggest chalk quarrying.



## **7 CONCLUSIONS**

The work undertaken by Network Archaeology Ltd successfully identified evidence of post-medieval domestic and building activity on the site.

All the archaeology encountered was clearly defined, and the conditions of the watching brief were good allowing a high degree of confidence in the results.

The finds from this small sample indicated the potential of this site to produce larger, stratified groups of post-medieval artefacts.

If any pre-19<sup>th</sup> century archaeological deposits survive, most are likely to have been truncated by the postulated chalk quarry pit or buried by the site levelling layers.

## **8 ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT**

### **8.1 Importance**

The archaeological remains found by this watching brief are probably of no greater than *local* importance.

### **8.2 Impact**

Ground reduction and service trench excavation will impact on post-medieval and later remains but the likelihood of an impact on earlier remains is considered low (see 6.2).

### **8.3 Significance of Impact**

The significance of impact is likely to be low, although, it is not possible to assess the significance of impact with certainty at this stage due to uncertainty regarding the full nature of the buried archaeological remains, their importance and the potential impact of the proposed development upon them.

## **9 EFFECTIVENESS OF THE WATCHING BRIEF IN MEETING THE PROJECT OBJECTIVES**

The watching brief revealed the presence of archaeological remains dating from the post-medieval period, though no medieval deposits were identified. The finds recovered indicate activity at the site from the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century to the modern period.

It has been possible to assess the potential impact of the proposed development on the site.

## 10    **ARCHIVE**

The project archive has been prepared in accordance with the guidelines outlined in *Management of Archaeological Projects*, Appendix 3, English Heritage, 1991. It is currently held at the Buckinghamshire office of Network Archaeology Ltd. It will be deposited at Buckinghamshire County Museum, Aylesbury. The museum accession number for this project is 2003.14.

## 11 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## 12 REFERENCES

British Geological Survey (BGS), 1946. *Aylesbury; Drift Geology, England and Wales Sheet 238*. Scale 1:50,000

Buckingham County Archaeological Service, *Brief for an Archaeological Watching Brief on Soil Test Pits, 81-3, High Street, Great Missenden*, issued 18/10/2002.

Soil Survey of England and Wales (SSEW), 1983. *Soils of England and Wales; Sheet 6, South east England*. Scale 1:250,000

## **13 STATEMENT OF INDEMNITY**

Every effort has been taken in the preparation and submission of this report in order to provide as complete an assessment as possible within the terms of the brief, and all statements and opinions are offered in good faith. Network Archaeology Ltd cannot accept responsibility for errors of fact or opinion resulting from data supplied by any third party, or for any loss or other consequences arising from decisions or actions made upon the basis of facts or opinions expressed in this report and any supplementary papers, howsoever such facts and opinions may have been derived, or as a result of unknown and undiscovered sites of artefacts.

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