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ILLUSTRATIONS

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig 1    Location plan
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GLOSSARY

ANGLO SAXON
Taken here as the period from the end of the Roman era c AD 400 to the Norman Conquest (AD 1066).

ARCHAEOLOGY
For the purposes of this project, archaeology is taken to mean the study of past human societies through their material remains, from prehistoric times to the modern era. No rigid upper date limit has been set, but AD 1900 is used as a general cut off point.

CAT
Cotswold Archaeological Trust.

CONTEXT
The simplest level of excavated archaeological data, ie a context could be the cut of a ditch (shown as - [1]) or its fill (shown as (2)).

IRON AGE
The first period in which iron was the predominant metal. In Britain it is dated between c 700 BC to the Roman conquest in AD 43.

MEDIEVAL
Taken here as the period from the Norman invasion of Britain in AD 1066 to approximately AD 1500.

MODERN
The period following the Post-medieval period.

POST-MEDIEVAL
The period following the medieval period. From c AD 1500.

NATURAL
Defined in archaeological terms this refers to the undisturbed natural geology of a site, eg. river terrace gravels.

NGR
National Grid Reference.

OCC
Oxfordshire County Council.

OD
Ordnance Datum.

OS
Ordnance Survey.
ROMANO-BRITISH
Term used to describe as fusion of indigenous late Iron Age traditions with Roman culture, often abbreviated as 'R-B'.

SAM
Scheduled Ancient Monument.

SMC
Scheduled Monument Consent.

SMR
Sites and Monument Record, held by Oxfordshire County Council.
SUMMARY

A programme of archaeological fieldwork was undertaken by Cotswold Archaeological Trust on the site of the former Pratts Garage premises at Malthouse Lane, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxon, in June 1996. The project, combining a watching brief and small scale excavation, was commissioned by David Courtney prior to residential development.

The archaeological remains within the study area are protected as part of the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Dorchester-on-Thames. As a condition of the granting of Scheduled Monument Consent fieldwork was required to mitigate the effects of any disturbance to underlying archaeological remains.

The development area lies within the north-western sector of the Roman, Saxon and medieval town. A desk-based assessment identified that up to 2.5m of archaeological stratigraphy might survive within the study area, with a considerable research potential for contributing to an understanding of the evolution of Roman and later settlement.

The development has been designed to minimise disturbance to underlying archaeological remains and the shallow groundworks have fortunately disturbed no significant deposits. Archaeological supervision of the removal of modern concrete and hardcore layers has revealed the presence of a widespread post-medieval garden soil. The excavation of service lines within this layer yielded a small quantity of residual Roman and later pottery.
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 In June 1996 Cotswold Archaeological Trust was commissioned by David Courtney to undertake archaeological fieldwork at the former Pratts Garage site, Malthouse Lane, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxon (centred on NGR: SU 5650 9428, Fig. 1).

1.1.2 Redevelopment of the site has involved the demolition of existing buildings and the construction of five two-bedroomed houses, with associated services, parking spaces and patios.

1.1.3 The study area lies within the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Dorchester-on-Thames (County no. 116, Fig. 2). Scheduled Monument Consent was applied for, and granted subject to a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording during development.

1.1.4 The works were required in order to mitigate the effects of any disturbance to underlying archaeological remains. Fieldwork was undertaken in accordance with the advice contained in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology and Planning and with the conditions of Scheduled Monument Consent received from the Department of National Heritage under advice from English Heritage.

1.1.5 Discussions were held between the County Archaeological Officer, Oxfordshire County Council; English Heritage; Cotswold Archaeological Trust and the client wherein outline proposals for the archaeological works were agreed. These proposals were finalised within a subsequent detailed project design (CAT 1996).

1.1.6 This report is structured as follows: Section 1 describes the landuse, geology and topography of the study area and the archaeological specification and methods adopted
for the fieldwork. Section 2 details the archaeological potential and history of the site. Section 3 presents the fieldwork results and section 4 concludes with a discussion of the significance of the archaeological remains encountered.

1.2 Landuse, topography and geology

1.2.1 The study area lies off Malthouse Lane within the north-western sector of Dorchester, approximately 20m west of the central High Street. The L-shaped study area is bound on all sides by residential development. It measures approximately 0.11 ha.

1.2.2 The study area was formerly utilised as the commercial premises of Pratts Garages. All service and repair workshops were demolished immediately prior to groundworks commencing. The site was covered by continuous hard-standing, the access drive mostly having been surfaced with tarmac whilst the remainder of the site was sealed by concrete of varying thickness. There are no known underground oil or petrol tanks within the development area, the garage forecourt having been located to the east alongside the High Street.

1.2.3 The study area consists of a flat piece of ground at approximately 50m OD.

1.2.4 The underlying geology of the site is mapped by the British Geological Survey (OS 1977, 1979) as Quaternary river terrace deposits (sands and gravels) overlying solid geology of Upper Greensand and Gault clays of the lower Cretaceous period.

1.3 Archaeological background

1.3.1 The site lies in an area of considerable archaeological importance. Fieldwork undertaken within the north-western sector of the town in recent years has been summarised within a desk-based assessment undertaken by CAT (Langton 1995). This highlighted that
occupation dating between the prehistoric and post-medieval periods lies within the surrounding area. There is a particularly strong possibility that deposits dating between the Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon periods might survive within the study area. The study area lies immediately to the south of archaeological excavations carried out in 1972 prior to residential development on the site of the former Beech House Hotel (Langton 1995, Fig 2). Occupation remains dating from the first century AD through to the 5th century AD were revealed, succeeded by fifth to tenth century AD Anglo-Saxon settlement.

1.3.2 The archaeological potential of the study area is reflected in its protection as part of the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Dorchester-on-Thames (county no.116, Fig 2)

Prehistoric

1.3.3 Dorchester lies within an area rich in prehistoric remains. A Neolithic ceremonial complex lies to the north-west of the town, a hillfort lies south of the river at Wittenham Clumps and an Iron Age promontory fort (presumed to be a Belgic oppidum complex) is situated south of the town at Dyke Hills. Late Iron Age settlement is also attested by pottery and over eighteen coins which have been recovered as chance finds and from excavations in and around Dorchester (Munby & Rodwell 1985).

Romano-British

1.3.4 Dorchester is situated on the road from Alchester to Silchester and represents one of only two known Roman small towns in Oxfordshire. Dorchester has a proposed origin as a conquest period Roman fort, developing into a small civilian settlement of approximately 13.5ha enclosed by broadly rectangular defences (Fig. 4). First and second century settlement appears to have stretched beyond the later walled area towards Dyke Hills.
1.3.5 Relatively little is known about the internal plan of the town. The present street pattern apparently bears no relationship to the Roman one and the position of the Roman gates of the defensive circuit are uncertain. No public buildings have yet been identified although remains of several first and second century timber-built buildings have been encountered. Casual finds of Roman artefacts are numerous from the town (Munby & Rodwell, op.cit).

1.3.6 The Beech House Hotel excavations identified the line of a late first to early second-century AD Roman road. The road, approximately 0.25-0.30m thick, ran along the eastern part of the site and was associated with a 5m wide ditch immediately to its west. Three phases of occupational activity were encountered between the road line and the town's defensive circuit. First to second century AD pits and layers were sealed by a probable mid third century AD and later courtyard house and associated features, along with building and occupation debris. In the late third or early fourth century AD the house appears to have been converted to industrial use (suggested by the discovery of twelve hearths and kilns) which continued into the fifth century AD.

*Anglo-Saxon*

1.3.7 Excavations during the 1960s and 1970s have revealed abundant traces of Saxon settlement in and around the town. Early Saxon graves with accompanying Germanic grave goods have been encountered. Sixth century AD sunken huts, mostly disregarding the Roman layout, have been excavated at three points within the walls.

1.3.8 Four recognisable phases of Saxon activity were identified at the Beech House Hotel site immediately north of the study area. The earliest phase of occupation was represented by two possible sunken-floored buildings of ?late fifth to early sixth-century AD date. ?Six timber-based structures, of probable sixth century AD date, comprise a second phase of occupation, whilst the third phase of occupation was represented by three or four stone based structures dated between the sixth and ninth centuries AD. A final phase of
occupation in the mid ninth century was noted from further stone-based structures.

1.3.9 The proximity of these Anglo-Saxon deposits to the present study area suggested that similarly well preserved remains might lie within the development area. Such remains hold the potential to improve our understanding of possible continuity between the late Roman to Early Saxon periods at Dorchester-on-Thames. Dorchester is one of only a few sites where late Roman Theodosian coinage increases as a percentage rather than declines, implying coins for official payments continued to arrive throughout the fourth century and possibly into the fifth century AD (Burnham and Wacher 1990).

Medieval and later

1.3.10 During the medieval period ribbon development of housing occurred alongside the High Street and Malthouse Lane (Munby & Rodwell 1985, Langton 1995). The study area also lies approximately 100 m west of the medieval abbey precinct (Fig. 3). Although no medieval buildings are known from the study area itself, buildings still survive opposite the study area on the south-eastern side of the lane. A medieval well, a possible wall and pits, the latter dating between the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries AD, were encountered during the excavations at the adjacent Beech House Hotel site.

1.3.11 Expansion during the post-medieval period is evidenced on the 1847 tithe map which shows additional buildings in the area north of Malthouse Lane and east of Watling Lane. The tithe map also shows a series of small buildings on the north, south and eastern edges of the study area. It is possible that post-medieval and modern activity may have disturbed earlier deposits within the study area.
1.4 Archaeological specification and methodology

1.4.1 The programme of archaeological fieldwork was undertaken in two stages. A watching brief was carried out during the removal of areas of existing hardstanding to ensure that, wherever possible, archaeological deposits were not inadvertently disturbed.

1.4.2 All concrete breaking in the positions of house plots 1 to 5 (Fig 4) was undertaken under archaeological supervision to ensure that the hardcore layer covering the site was not penetrated. Provision was made to record any significant archaeological deposits uncovered during groundworks and to notify the County Archaeological Officer and English Heritage in case further mitigation action was required. Fieldwork was carried out in accordance with the 'Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs' issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA 1994).

1.4.3 In those areas such as drainage runs where excavation below the level of the raft foundation was unavoidable, excavation continued by hand. All archaeological deposits encountered within the trenches were recorded in accordance with the standards contained in the CAT Field Recording Manual (1996). A full written record was compiled on pro-forma context sheets, and supplemented by written and drawn records. Photographic coverage consisted of general site views as well as archive and record photographs, using monochrome and colour slide film.

1.4.4 All artefacts recovered were retained for processing and analysis in accordance with the CAT Treatment of Finds immediately after Excavation manual (1993). Subject to the agreement of the legal landowner CAT will make arrangements with the appropriate museum for the deposition of the archive and artefact collection.

1.4.5 A site visit to monitor the progress of the watching brief was made by Mr Paul Smith, County Archaeological Officer, Oxfordshire County Council on the 4th June 1996. Mr Roger Thomas of English Heritage was notified of the commencement of fieldwork and given the opportunity to visit.
2. FIELDWORK RESULTS

2.1 A CAT Project Officer attended on site whilst the concrete slab was broken out in the area of house plots 1-5. The thickness of the slab varied between an average of 100 and 200mm.

2.2 Removal of the concrete slab (101) revealed underlying modern hardcore (102), at least 0.15m thick, across most of the area of plots 1-5. The thickness of concrete correlated with the results of earlier test-pitting, carried out by Mr David Pope for Mr Paul Smith, to test the likely depth of hardstanding.

2.3 Where underlying loam soil (103) was revealed across areas of the house plots this was rapidly recovered with a protective layer of hardcore.

2.4 Two residual sherds of Roman pottery, dating between AD 240-400, were recovered from the surface of the loam soil horizon, which was heavily contaminated with early modern brick, glass and china fragments.

2.5 House-plot 3 extended 2m beyond the edge of the existing concrete slab. An accumulation of loam soil and garage related debris (104) was excavated in this area to a level equivalent to the base of the adjacent underlying hardcore. The fine dark brown clay-loam soil was highly contaminated with modern metal, brick and plastic fragments and other materials. Required levels for construction were reached with only approximately 0.15m penetration into the underlying post-medieval garden soil. No archaeological features were encountered.
Hand excavation of service lines  Fig.4

2.6 All intrusive groundworks for new services (combining water, power, telephone and drainage lines) running from the site entrance through to the house plots were hand-excavated by CAT staff. Drain lines running from points within the house plots through to these external service runs were sufficiently shallow to be set either above or within the protective hardcore layer previously retained. The siting of these drain lines were subjected to archaeological observation.

2.7 All excavated drain runs revealed an identical stratigraphic sequence. A dark brown post-medieval/early modern garden soil (103) was encountered across the site. This layer contained fragments of china, glass and brick/tile, as well as residual pottery of Roman, Saxon and medieval date. The removal of a telegraph pole stub during preparatory works on site afforded an opportunity to examine the thickness of this loam deposit. This suggested that dark-brown loamy soil (s) underlie the hardcore cover to a depth of at least 1.25m. No apparent differentiation within this horizon could be noted.

2.8 Excavation of deep new soakaways and several associated drain-runs, for surface water collection proved unnecessary since it was possible to partially remove the structure of a large modern brick-built drain and fill the chamber with hardcore (Fig. 4). No archaeological deposits were encountered during this process.

2.9 A decision remains pending as to whether a footing line, for a short length of boundary wall, will be excavated. Should groundworks proceed, to an anticipated depth of 400mm, it has been agreed that a further monitoring visit will be made; the results of which will be detailed within a summary statement forwarded to English Heritage.
3. DISCUSSION

3.1 Fieldwork, combining a watching brief with hand excavation of service runs, has successfully countered the potential loss of archaeological information during groundworks.

3.2 The study area lies within a part of Dorchester where potentially thick, well preserved and important stratigraphy may survive. The design of the development, by preserving underlying archaeological remains in-situ and keeping groundwork depths to a minimum, has however successfully protected the scheduled archaeological remains. In particular archaeological excavation of potentially deep and complex stratified remains within the narrow service trenches, where intelligibility of deposits would be problematic, has been avoided.

3.3 Although previous fieldwork north of the study area suggested that Roman and Saxon deposits might be encountered at depths as shallow as 0.50m below existing ground level, fortunately no Romano-British or Anglo-Saxon deposits have been disturbed by the groundworks. The recovery of Roman and Saxon or medieval pottery from excavated service runs nevertheless alludes to the likelihood that deposits of such date survive at depth below post-medieval and modern soil horizons.
Fig. 4  Location of building plots 1-5 and associated service-runs