

**Land north of Croft Road, Spencers Wood, Reading,
Berkshire, Areas 3 and 4**

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For Taylor Wimpey, West London

by

Elspeth St-John Brooks

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code: CRSW 17/256

April 2019

Summary

Site name: Areas 3 and 4, Land north of Croft Road, Spencers Wood, Reading, Berkshire

Grid reference: Area 3: SU 7230 6720
Area 4: SU 7241 6717

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 17th October to 1st November 2018

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisors: Elspeth St-John Brooks, Josh Hargreaves

Site code: CRSW 17/256

Area of site: Area 3: 0.31ha
Area 4: 0.30ha

Summary of results: Tree roots, a modern field boundary and ridge and furrow were observed in two areas of watching brief but no archaeological features nor artefacts were recorded.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with a local museum in due course.

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Area 3 and 4, Land north of Croft Road, Spencers Wood, Reading, Berkshire An Archaeological Watching Brief

by Elspeth St-John Brooks

Report 17/256

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out on two areas of land north of Croft Road, Spencers Wood, Reading, Berkshire (SU 7230 6720 Area 3 in the west; SU 7241 6717 Area 4 in the east) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Steven Weaver formerly of CgMS Consulting, Burlington House, Lypiatt Road, Cheltenham, GL50 2SY on behalf of Taylor Wimpey and David Wilson Homes.

Planning permission (170010) was gained from Wokingham Council for development of land for dwellings and associated works at Spencers Wood, Reading, Berkshire (Fig. 1). Due to the potential disturbance and damage to below ground archaeological features, a condition (33) has been attached to the planning consent requiring that a programme of archaeological investigation be carried out. This report relates to two separate plots of land for which an archaeological watching brief was required, hereafter referred to as mitigation areas 3 and 4 respectively.

This is in accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government's *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2012) and the Council's policies on archaeology. The fieldwork was undertaken by Becky Constable, Elspeth St. John-Brooks, Maisie Foster and Josh Hargreaves between the 17th October and 1st November 2018 and the site code is CRSW 17/256.

The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at West Berkshire Museum in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The development of land north of Croft Road, Spencers Wood consists of several parcels of land on the eastern margins of the village of Spencers Wood, Berkshire, located approximately 600m north east of the centre. Mitigation Areas 3 and 4 are located to the north of Croft Road, and adjacent to Ryeish Lane. Prior to development, these areas consisted of a mixture of unused plots and fields used as pasture for cattle and horses. Both areas are relatively flat, with a slight downwards slope towards the north in Area 3. Land situated south of the areas reported here and north of Croft Road is currently under development, with a new housing estate under construction (Fig. 2). The development area lies within the margins of the Foudry Brook/River Kennet valley,

which contains a range of archaeological sites. Field survey (Ford 1997) and aerial survey (Gates 1975) had previously indicated the archaeological potential in the area with recently excavated sites having shown particularly deposits of Iron Age and Roman date such as at Grazeley Road and Mere oak Lane to the west (Ford et al 2011; Milbank 2010)

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential was initially assessed by desk-based assessments (CgMs 2010; 2012), a fieldwalking survey (Ford 1997), aerial photography (Gates 1975) and geophysical survey (Stratascan 1997a and b) had previously indicated the archaeological potential of the area. Recently excavated sites in the area showed deposits of Iron Age and Roman date at Grazeley Road (Ford *et al.* 2011a) and at Mere oak Lane (Milbank 2010) to the west with further Iron Age deposits to the south west (ASE 2004a; 2004b).

Furthermore, the archaeological potential of the site has been previously evaluated (CA 2017). In total four Mitigation Areas were explored in this evaluation. Area 1 was evaluated with five trenches (43-47) which identified an area of Iron Age and Roman activity along with cremation burials in the north-eastern portion of this area with other undated features to the south. Area 2 was evaluated with another five trenches (26-7, 29-30) identifying an area containing an earthwork and features possibly of Iron Age, Roman or Medieval in date. Five trenches in Area 3 (31-32) and Area 4 (35,36,38) identified an area of undated features including ditches, gullies and postholes. Fieldwork on mitigation areas 1 and 2 will be reported separately

Objectives and methodology

The objectives of this watching brief were to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the ground works, and aimed to characterise any archaeological deposits and/or features encountered. A 360° type excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket was used to remove topsoil and subsoil and expose the underlying natural geology. This work took place under constant archaeological supervision, and where necessary the surface of the natural geology was cleaned by hand. All potential archaeological features were to be cleaned and investigated by hand, with sufficient time allowed within the groundworks schedule without causing undue delay.

Results

Area 3: Access Roads, Roadways and Drainage Trench (Fig. 2; Pls 1 and 2)

Initially, an area was stripped for a new access road, roadways and drainage traversing Area 3 (Fig. 3). This strip was approximately 12m wide and measured, at longest, 94m from east to west and 102m from north to south (Fig. 3). The stratigraphy typically comprised 0.09m of topsoil above 0.32m mid brownish grey clayey silt subsoil above light yellowish-brown silty clay natural geology with large patches of small clast gravel.

Within the trench, an area to the west of the centre revealed extensive root damage, with tree throws and numerous associated root holes visible (Pl. 2). Remnants of ridge and furrow was evident across the whole area, both prior to the removal of overburden and afterwards in the form of dark striations representing the base of the former furrows (Pl. 1). Two land drains were identified, running across the site in a north/south alignment and a modern truncation was found along the western limit of excavation, partially underneath the baulk. This feature was filled with a light brown-yellow large clayey flinty gravel. Modern debris was found within the pit, and the cut had very angular corners and edges.

Area 4: Land to the east of Ryeish Lane. (Fig. 2)

Area 4 comprised an oval parcel of land with access from the eastern margin of Ryeish lane. The area lies directly east of mitigation Area 3, across Ryeish Lane. Topsoil and subsoil were removed to expose the underlying natural geology, which consisted of the same yellow-brown silty clay with patches of small clast gravel identified in mitigation Area 3. Investigation of the exposed levels in this area revealed no archaeological features, deposits or finds. Other than the line of a grubbed out modern field boundary.

Finds

Archaeological mitigation areas 3 and 4 were investigated as intended. No finds or features of archaeological interest were observed in either mitigation area.

Conclusion

Although no archaeological features were discovered, the watching briefs undertaken for mitigation areas 3 and 4 have been successful in identifying a range of natural features such as tree roots and tree throws, along with evidence for ridge and furrow in Area 3. The locations of former archaeological evaluation trenches (CA 2017) were also noted.

References

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