Horseman Coaches Depot, Whitley Wood Lane, Reading, Berkshire

An Archaeological Evaluation

for CgMs

by Danielle Millbank

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code HDR08/94

August 2008

Summary

Site name: Horseman Coach Depot, Whitley Wood Lane, Reading, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 7165 6895

Site activity: Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 11th August 2008

Project manager: Jennifer Lowe

Site supervisor: Danielle Milbank

Site code: HDR 08/94

Area of site: *c.* 1.4 ha

Summary of results: **No** archaeological features or deposits were encountered.

Monuments identified: None

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

Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford✓ 19.08.08 Steve Preston✓ 19.08.08

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Report 08/94

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at the former Horseman Coach Depot, Whitley Wood Lane, Reading, Berkshire (SU 7165 6895) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Paul Chadwick of CgMs Consulting, Morley House, 26 Holborn Viaduct, London EC1A 2AT on behalf of Reading Borough Council.

Planning consent has been gained from Reading and Wokingham Borough Council for a new park and ride scheme and junction improvements at the M4 and A33 junction, south Reading. A significant part of the works comprises a new wide carriageway on the north side of the motorway which requires relocation of a maintenance compound. As a consequence of the possibility of archaeological deposits on the site which may be damaged or destroyed during groundworks, a field evaluation was requested. The current report is concerned with a small part of the larger development scheme for which further works are ongoing and which will be reported on separately.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the Borough Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Ms Mary O'Donoghue, Archaeology Officer with Berkshire Archaeology, advisers to the Borough on matters relating to archaeology. The fieldwork was undertaken by Danielle Milbank and Simon Cass on the 11th August 2008 and the site code is HDR08/94. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Reading Museum in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site comprises an irregular plot of land south of the centre of Reading, on the north side of the A33 and the west side of Whitley Wood Lane (Fig. 1). It is *c.* 3km south of the confluence of the Kennet and Thames rivers. Buildings on the site have been demolished, and the site is currently occupied by demolition rubble, a concrete parking/turning area (at the south) and an electricity substation. The site is relatively flat at *c.* 43m above

Ordnance Datum, and is located on London Clay (BGS 1971) which was the natural geology observed in both trenches.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential stems from the site's location on the margins of the Kennet Valley/Foudry Brook. Extensive archaeological deposits of prehistoric and Roman date were recorded to the west at Green Park (Brossler *et al.* 2004; Moore and Jennings 1992). Relatively recent field survey and earlier aerial photography has also indicated the archaeological potential of the area (Lobb and Rose 1996; Gates 1975). As a consequence, the site has the potential to contain further deposits of prehistoric and later date. Recent evaluation of parcels of land to the south of the M4 located a small area of Iron Age deposits (Hindmarch 2003) and evaluation (Cass 2007) and follow-up fieldwork on the A33 widening and related works compound to the south west has revealed a wealth of late Iron Age and Roman deposits. Of more significance, however, is the presence of a Roman occupation site located to the west of the current site, immediately to the west of the old A33 (Howell and Ford 1994).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the area of development. The specific research aims of this project were:

to determine if archaeologically relevant levels have survived on the site;

to determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present;

to determine of deposits of prehistoric, Roman, Saxon or medieval date are present on the site; and

to determine if further Roman occupation deposits are present, continuing those found further to the west.

Two trenches were to be excavated, under constant archaeological supervision, by means of a 360°-type machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. These were to be 60m and 25m long, and 1.8m-2m wide. They were positioned to target what were considered to be relatively undisturbed parts of the site, avoiding the footprint of the demolished building. All spoilheaps were to be checked for finds.

Results

Both trenches were dug more or less in the positions intended. A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

Trench 1 (Plate 1)

Trench 1 was aligned north-south, and was 1.8m wide, 58.5m long, and measured 0.39m deep at the southern end, 0.64m at the north end, with a test pit excavated to 0.86m at the north to verify the natural geology. Due to considerable ingress of water at the northern end, Trench 1 was excavated in several portions, with baulks left in place to manage this water and allow for the surface of the natural clay to be cleaned and examined. These baulks were subsequently removed, with the exception of a portion between 48.5m and 50.5m.

At the south, the mixed demolition rubble (crushed concrete and Tarmac), hardcore and gravel layer was 0.22m thick. This overlay plastic blue grey clay with *c.* 50% hardcore inclusions, which was 0.08m thick. This in turn overlay slightly mottled firm plastic grey clay with no inclusions, which comprised the natural geology.

At the northern end, the rubble and hardcore layer was 0.25m thick. This overlay a mixed hardcore and plastic blue grey clay layer which was 0.13m thick. This in turn overlay the natural clay geology, which was slightly mottled and blue-stained. The test pit showed that the bluish staining of the natural clay by fuel or other hydrocarbons stopped at a depth of 0.60m to 0.70m. No archaeological deposits, finds or features were encountered.

Trench 2 (Plate 2)

Trench 2 was aligned SE-NW, was 1.8m wide, 21.0m long and 0.44m deep overall. Here, the demolition rubble (crushed concrete and Tarmac), hardcore and gravel layer was 0.25m thick. From 0.25m to 0.32m was a mixed layer of blue grey plastic clay with hardcore inclusions. This overlay slightly mottled yellow/green and slightly bluish grey clay with no inclusions, which comprised the underlying geology of the area. Several possible features were cleaned and excavated, but these proved to be fuel staining and patches of natural variation in the geology. No archaeological deposits, finds or features were encountered in this trench.

Conclusion

Despite the potential of the site to contain archaeological deposits, none were encountered in either of the evaluation trenches. The underlying clay geology was exposed fully in both trenches and was stained in places with fuel or other hydrocarbons, especially in Trench 1. It was apparent that groundwork on the site had had a considerable impact on the underlying geology. The demolition rubble layer was consistent across the site, and

was evidently the result of the demolition of the Depot building, and associated surfaces (parking and turning areas). However, the mixed hardcore and clay layer was fairly consistent across the areas of Trenches 1 and 2, and the natural clay was visibly truncated in places by the teeth of a machine bucket. These were infilled with the hardcore, and suggest that the construction of the Depot caused considerable disturbance of the natural clay.

The lack of any discernible subsoil or similar layer suggests that the site as a whole had at least been stripped of overburden and may even had been truncated and levelled. The upper horizon of the (mostly) undisturbed clay was at a level of 42.7m AOD at the north end of Trench 1, and 42.9m AOD at the south end, and in Trench 2 was 42.5m AOD overall. Although it is not possible to determine precisely the ground level prior to construction of the former Depot, comparison with the higher levels of the land surrounding the site suggests the ground level was reduced, perhaps by a considerable depth, and certainly extensively. In this case, any archaeological deposits on the site would have been damaged or destroyed before the former Depot was built.

References

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APPENDIX 1: Trench details

0m at S or SE end

Trench	*Length (m)*	*Breadth (m)*	*Depth (m)*	*Comment*
1	58.5	1.8	S 0.39; N 0.64	South: 0-0.22m crushed concrete and Tarmac, gravel and hardcore; 0.22m-0.30m blue grey clay and hardcore, 0.30m+ natural clay geology. North: 0.00m-0.25m crushed concrete and Tarmac, gravel and hardcore; 0.25m-0.38m blue grey clay and hardcore, 0.38m+ natural clay geology. **[Plate 1]**
2	21.0	1.8	0.44	0-0.25m crushed concrete and Tarmac, gravel and hardcore; 0.25m-0.32m grey clay and hardcore; 0.32m+ natural clay geology **[Plate 2]**

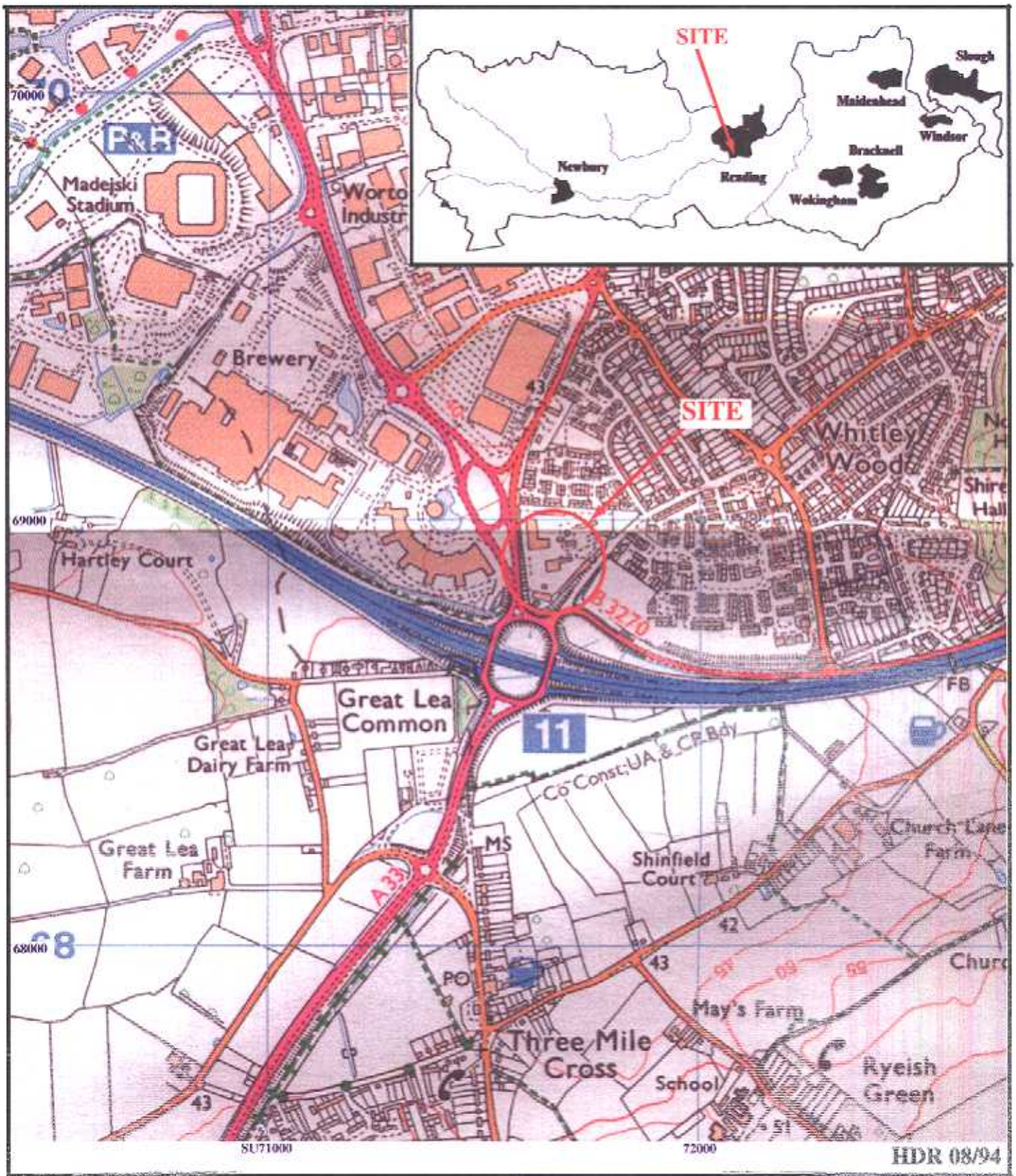

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Figure 1. Location of site within Reading and Berkshire.

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Figure 2. Detailed location of site on Whitley Wood Road.

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Figure 3. Location of trenches.

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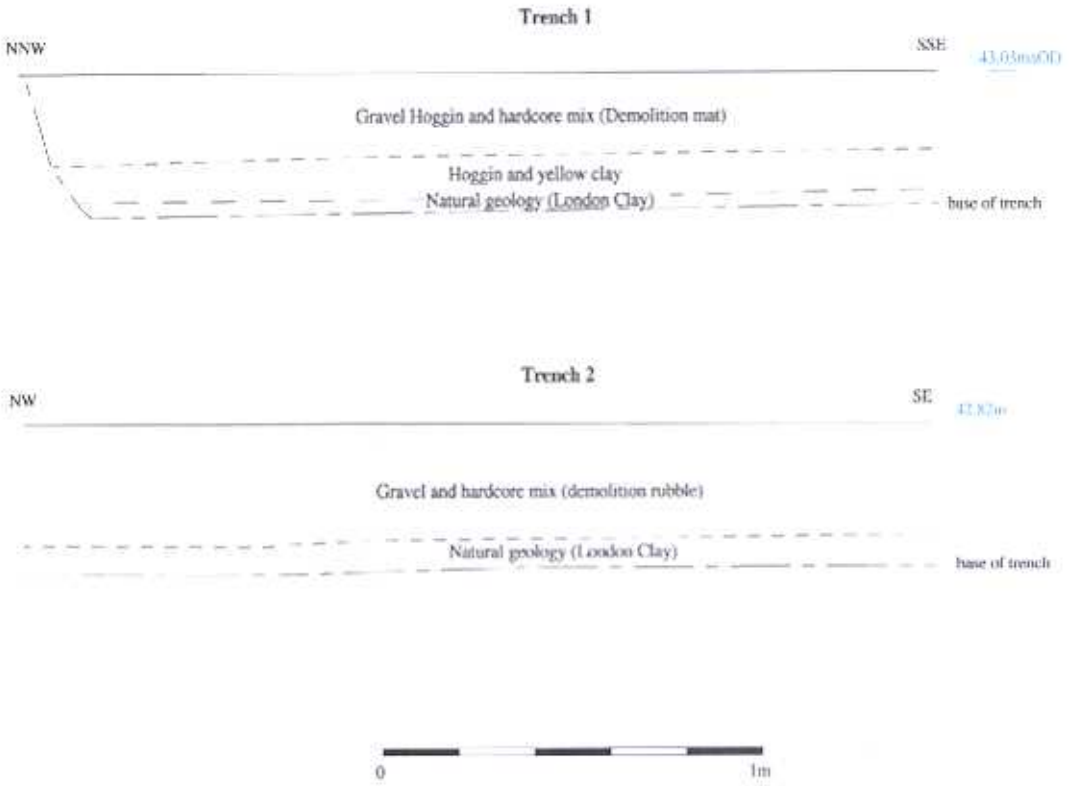

Figure 4. Representative sections.

Plate 1. Trench 1, looking north, scales: 0.5m and 0.3m.

Plate 2. Trench 2, looking north-west, scales: 0.5m and 0.3m.

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