

Old Walls, Sonning Lane, Sonning, Berkshire

An Archaeological Evaluation

for Mr Tony Griffiths

by Andy Taylor

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code WSS 06/36

April 2006

Summary

Site name: Old Walls, Sonning Lane, Sonning, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 7562 7536

Site activity: Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 27th March 2006

Project manager: Joanna Pine

Site supervisor: Andy Taylor

Site code: WSS 06/36

Area of site: c.0.22 hectares

Summary of results: Two medieval gullies were located.

Monuments identified: Two medieval gullies.

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.

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Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford ✓ 03.04.06 Steve Preston ✓ 04.04.06
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Report 06/36

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out Old Walls, Sonning Lane, Sonning, Berkshire (SU 7562 7536) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Kevin Hendley of A. K. Harris Partnership, Chartered Architects, 101 London Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5BY on behalf of Mr Tony Griffiths of Old Walls, Sonning Lane, Sonning, Berkshire.

A planning consent (F/2005/4745) has been gained from Wokingham District Council for the demolition of the existing structure and the construction of a new house and garage. The consent is subject to a condition relating to archaeology requiring a programme of mitigation prior to construction.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the District Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr David Thomason, Archaeology Officer with Berkshire Archaeology, advisers to Wokingham District Council on matters relating to archaeology. The fieldwork was undertaken by Andy Taylor and Jenny Ryder on the 27th March 2006 and the site code is WSS 06/36. 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 is located on an irregular parcel of land at 'Old Walls', Sonning Lane, Sonning, Berkshire (Fig. 2) and is currently occupied by a large detached house. It lies on the east side of Sonning Lane, on the south-west margin of the village c.2km to the north-east of Reading. The underlying geology consists of Valley Gravel and Upper Chalk (BGS 1971). The site lies at a height of c.50m above Ordnance Datum.

Archaeological background

The site lies close to the Saxon and medieval settlement of Sonning, which was an important administrative and ecclesiastical centre. On the opposite side of Sonning Lane from the proposed development area lies the site of the Bishop of Salisbury's palace. The known remains, dating from the 13th century, were partly excavated

during the First World War and revealed medieval buildings. Excavations to the north of the site, in the grounds of the vicarage, uncovered late Saxon and early medieval deposits (Hull and Hall 2003). In more general terms, the site lies in the archaeologically rich Thames Valley with important prehistoric and Roman remains visible from the air and located to the east of the village (Ford 1987).

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.

Specific aims of the evaluation were;

To determine if archaeologically relevant levels have survived on this site.

To determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present.

To determine if deposits of medieval or early post medieval date are present on the site which will help determine the topography and chronological development of the settlement.

Two trenches, 14m long and 1.6m wide were to be dug using a JCB-type machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. These were dug under constant archaeological supervision and all spoilheaps were monitored for finds. A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

Results

The two trenches dug measured between 12.80m and 13.00m in length. They were dug as near as possible to their original intended positions, although the presence of shrubs resulted in a slight repositioning of Trench 2 and both being slightly shorter than originally intended. These adjustments took place in consultation with the monitor.

Trench 1 (Plate 1, Figs 4 and 5)

This trench was 13m long and consisted of topsoil overlying subsoil overlying a grey silty clay overlying gravel natural. What appeared to be a single ditch on the surface, aligned approximately east-west, ran the whole length of the trench. The gullies lay beneath the grey silty clay layer and were cut through the gravel. A slot (1 and 2) was excavated through it measuring 1.60m in length, which revealed this to be, in fact, two parallel gullies. Gully 1 measured 0.50m wide and 0.20m deep. Gully 2 measured 0.35m wide and 0.12m deep. The fill of 1 (50)

was a grey brown silty clay and contained three pieces of medieval pottery and 12 pieces of animal bone. Gully 2 did not contain any dating evidence and no stratigraphic relationship was evident between the two.

Trench 2 (Plate 2)

This trench was 12.8m long and orientated SW–NE. The stratigraphy consisted of topsoil overlying a brown silty clay overlying gravel natural. No archaeological deposits were revealed nor finds recovered from the spoilheaps.

Finds

Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The assemblage comprised three sherds with a total weight of 48g. They were all medieval, and all occurred in the same context, fill 50 of gully 1. The following fabrics were noted:

Local fine sandy ware, ?Late 11th–? 14th century. A range of fine sandy fabrics, similar to those noted at the Reading Waterfront excavations (Underwood 1997, 144). Fine sandy wares such as these are found along a considerable length of the middle Thames Valley and its hinterland, and the problem of differentiating between the numerous different wares has been noted in the past (Mellor 1994, 84). For example, Mellor has identified at least four different quartz-tempered fabrics in southern Oxfordshire and its environs, with centres such as Henley-on-Thames and Maidenhead producing very similar quartz tempered wares. Historical sources indicate that there were potters in Henley during the 13th and 14th centuries, and perhaps even Reading itself (Mellor 1994, 208 and 210), and it is likely that other, non-documented sources in the hinterland of Reading await discovery. A kiln is known from Maidenhead (Pike 1965), and the manufactory at Ashampstead, to the west of Reading, is another possible source (Mepham and Heaton 1995). Consequently, this fabric category should be regarded as a group of several similar traditions, rather than pottery from a single source. 2 sherds, 15g.

Newbury A/B ware (Mepham 1997, 51–2). Flint, sand and shell tempered ware, probably manufactured in the Savernake Forest (Mepham 1997, 65). It has a wide distribution throughout Berkshire, northern Hampshire and Oxfordshire: Mepham 1997, fig. 29), and a small number of sherds are known from south Northants (Blinkhorn 2000, 16). Handmade wares with moderate to dense angular flint up to 2mm, moderate to dense quartz up to 1mm. c. 1075 - early 13th century. 1 sherd, 33g.

The fabric types are all well-known in the region. The two sandy ware sherds were plain bodysherds, with the other sherd being an everted jar rim which is a typical product of the tradition.

Animal Bone by Ceri Falys

A total of 12 pieces of bone weighing 438g were recovered from a single context, gully 1. Overall the pieces were in good condition, although fragmented to varying degrees with minor amounts of surface damage through root activity. All of the identifiable fragments were from cattle: two of the pieces could be refitted in to a single proximal radius-ulna, four rib fragments were present, and an innominate with acetabulum. No evidence of butchery was observed.

Conclusion

A small number of archaeological deposits were identified during the evaluation in the form of two parallel gullies. These were aligned approximately east–west and can be dated to the Medieval period. Their exact nature is difficult to determine but they may represent a boundary, perhaps to a croft, or paddocks or animal pens. It seems likely that that further deposits may exist on the site within the vicinity of those already identified.

References

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APPENDIX 1: Trench details
0m at S or W end

<i>Trench No.</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	13.00	1.60	1.42	0.00m-0.45m topsoil; 0.45m-0.93m subsoil; 0.93m-1.42m mid grey silty clay; 1.42m+ gravel natural. Gullies 1 and 2. [Plate 1]
2	12.80	1.60	1.30	0.00m-0.30m topsoil; 0.30m-1.30m mid brown silty clay; 1.30m+ gravel natural. [Plate 2]

APPENDIX 2: Feature details

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
1	1	50	Gully	Medieval	Pottery
1	2	51	Gully	Unknown	None



**Old Walls, Sonning Lane, Sonning,
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Figure 1. Location of site within Sonning
and Berkshire.

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Figure 2. Detailed location of site on Sonning Lane.
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Figure 3: Trench Locations

Old Walls, Sonning Lane, Sonning, Berkshire, 2006

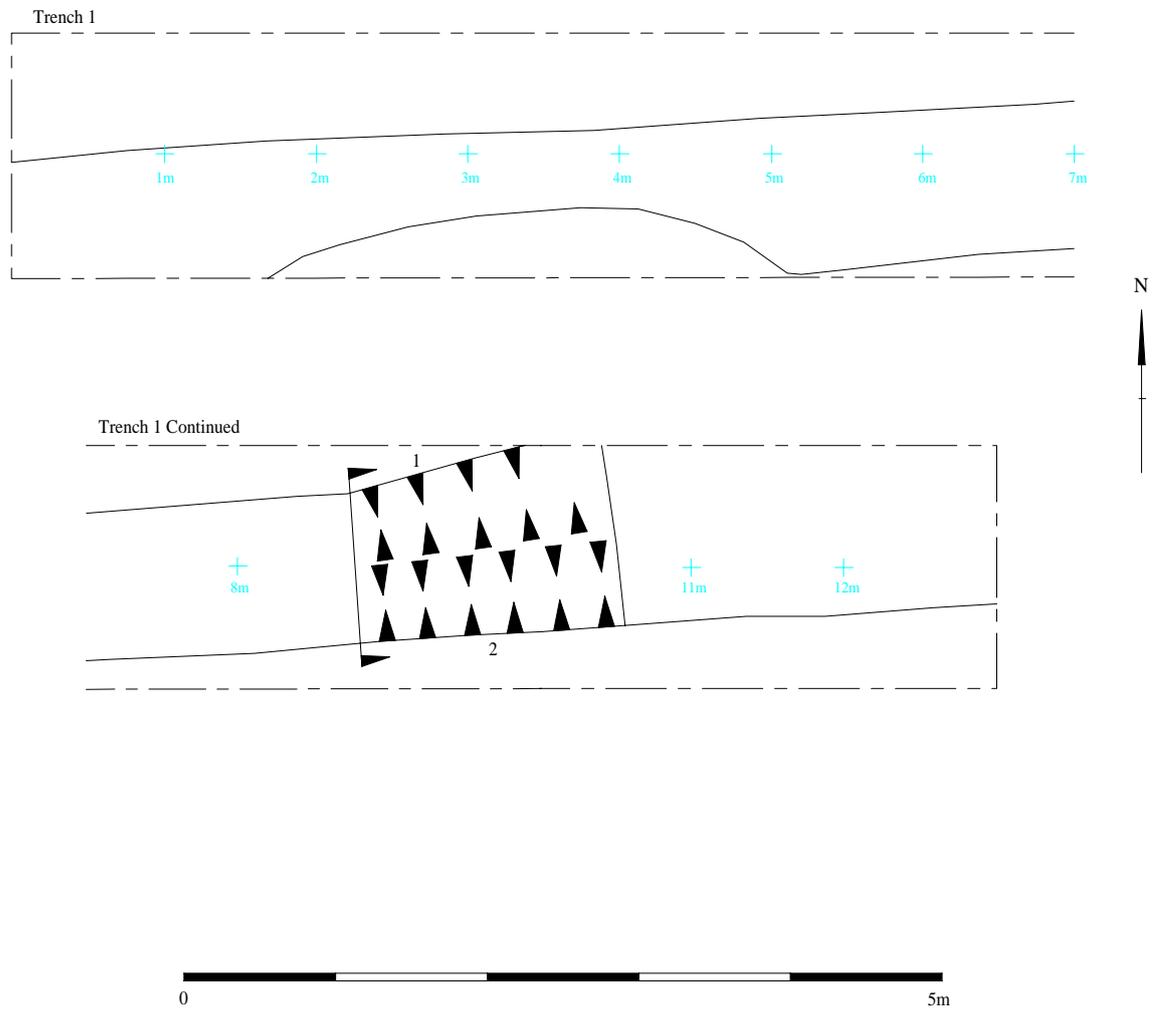


Figure 4: Trench Plan

Old Walls, Sonning Lane, Sonning, Berkshire, 2006

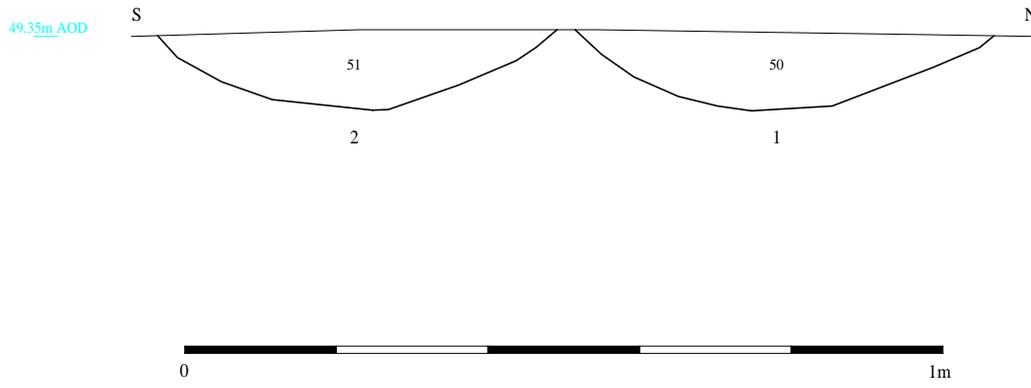


Figure 5: Section



Plate 1. Trench 1 looking south east, foreground scale 1m, distant scale 2m.



Plate 2. Trench 2 looking south west, foreground scale 1m, distant scale 2m.