Land to the rear of Mays Close, Earley, Reading, Berkshire

An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment

for Bancroft Developments

by Steve Ford
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code MCE05/103

October 2005
Summary

Site name: Land at 28/30 Church Road and 1-11 Mays Close, Earley, Reading, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 7470 7248

Site activity: Desk-based assessment

Site supervisor: Steve Ford

Site code: MCE05/103

Area of site: 0.56 ha

Summary of results: The site lies within an area of low to moderate archaeological potential.

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Preston  19.10.05
                           Jennifer Lowe  19.10.05
Introduction

This desk-based study is an assessment of the archaeological potential of land located off Mays Close, Earley, Reading, Berkshire (Fig. 1). The project was commissioned by Mr Alex Horder of Bancroft Developments, Stratfield House, 265 High Street, Crowthorne, Berkshire, RG45 7AH and comprises the first stage of a process to determine the presence/absence, extent, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains which may be affected by redevelopment of the area.

Site description, location and geology

The site currently consists of an irregular area comprising the rear gardens of eight properties fronting Mays Close and Church Road with an area of scrubland off Mays Close. The site lies to the east of Church Road and just to the north of the cutting for the A329M with the Reading to London Waterloo railway beyond. The development area is centred on NGR SU 7470 7248 and covers approximately 0.56ha. The site is mapped as being on plateau gravel (BGS 1946) but is actually located on the Lynch Hill gravel (Wymer 1999, map 6). It is at a height of approximately 63m above Ordnance Datum.

Planning background and development proposals

Planning permission is to be sought for the development of the site for housing.

Archaeology and Planning (PPG 16 1990) provides guidance relating to archaeology within the planning process. It points out that where a desk-based assessment has shown that there is a strong possibility of significant archaeological deposits in a development area it is reasonable to provide more detailed information from a field evaluation so that an appropriate strategy to mitigate the effects of development on archaeology can be devised:

Paragraph 21 states:

‘Where early discussions with local planning authorities or the developer’s own research indicate that important archaeological remains may exist, it is reasonable for the planning authority to
request the prospective developer to arrange for an archaeological field evaluation to be carried out...’

Should the presence of archaeological deposits be confirmed further guidance is provided. *Archaeology and Planning* stresses preservation *in situ* of archaeological deposits as a first consideration as in paragraphs 8 and 18.

Paragraph 8 states:

‘...Where nationally important archaeological remains, whether scheduled or not, and their settings, are affected by proposed development there should be a presumption in favour of their physical preservation...’

Paragraph 18 states:

‘The desirability of preserving an ancient monument and its setting is a material consideration in determining planning applications whether that monument is scheduled or unscheduled...’

However, for archaeological deposits that are not of such significance it is appropriate for them to be ‘preserved by record’ (i.e., fully excavated and recorded by a competent archaeological contractor) prior to their destruction or damage.

Paragraph 25 states:

‘Where planning authorities decide that the physical preservation *in situ* of archaeological remains is not justified in the circumstances of the development and that development resulting in the destruction of the archaeological remains should proceed, it would be entirely reasonable for the planning authority to satisfy itself ... that the developer has made appropriate and satisfactory provision for the excavation and recording of remains.’


Policy WOS10: The Historic Environment:

‘The Council recognises the value of the District’s Historical Environment and will seek to protect listed buildings and their settings, preserve and enhance the character of the conservation areas, to protect Scheduled Monuments, Areas of Archaeological Importance and historic landscapes.’

Policy WHE14: Buildings of traditional local character:
‘The Council will identify individual buildings and groups of buildings of traditional local character, whose preservation will be encouraged by:

a) urging the owners of those buildings to maintain, repair and restore them

b) bringing to the attention of the DoE any building that appears to merit inclusion on the statutory list of buildings of special architectural or historical interest.’

Policy WHE15: Development affecting Archaeological Sites:

‘The Council will seek to protect archaeological sites when dealing with development proposals. Therefore, where development is likely to affect an archaeological site of unknown importance or an area of high archaeological potential as shown on the proposals map, the council will require provision to be made for an appropriate evaluation (both desk and field) of the site, prior to the determination of the application. In the absence of appropriate information of the extent and importance of archaeological deposits, an application will normally be refused until such information is made available.’

Policy WHE16: Development affecting Ancient Monuments:

‘Development proposals that could adversely affect a Scheduled Ancient Monument or its setting, or a site identified in Berkshire’s Site and Monuments Record as being of national, regional or county importance, will be resisted. However, planning permission may be granted for a development where:

a) The Secretary of State for National Heritage has issued Scheduled Ancient Monument consent, where applicable

b) There are no overriding local archaeological reasons for preservation

c) Adequate provision has been made for the protection and recording of archaeological remains prior to and/or during development. Where appropriate this will be safeguarded by planning conditions, or, preferably a legal agreement to ensure that access, time and financial resources are available to allow essential recording to take place

d) Adequate provision has been made for the protection and preservation of the site and its setting through a programme of site management.’

Policy HE17:
‘In considering proposals for development the Council will seek to ensure that archaeological sites and monuments not meriting permanent preservation have provision made for an appropriate level of archaeological investigation prior to damage or destruction. Where appropriate this will be safeguarded by condition(s). Planning agreements may also be sought to ensure that access, time and financial resources are available to allow essential archaeological recording to take place.’

This is further reiterated in the Berkshire Structure Plan 1991–2006 (BCC 1994).

Policy EN5, para 6.16:

‘Archaeological remains are irreplaceable. They are the evidence, in some cases the only evidence of the past development of our civilisation. They comprise a varied resource, including buried objects, and standing structures ranging in date from prehistory to the industrial era. Particular care must be taken to ensure that archaeological remains and evidence are not needlessly or thoughtlessly destroyed.’

Policy EN6 states:

‘Scheduled Ancient Monuments and the most important non-scheduled remains, together with their settings, will be protected and managed to ensure that they are not damaged or destroyed. Where a lack of information precludes the proper assessment of a site or sites with archaeological potential, this information will have to be provided in advance of any decision to affect that site or area. Where preservation is not possible local planning authorities should be satisfied before granting planning permission that appropriate arrangements have been made for excavation and recording to take place prior to development.’

Methodology

The assessment of the site was carried out by the examination of pre-existing information from a number of sources recommended by the Institute of Field Archaeologists paper ‘Standards in British Archaeology’ covering desk-based studies. These sources include historic and modern maps, the Berkshire Sites and Monuments Record, geological maps and any relevant publications or reports.


**Archaeological background**

*General background*

The site lies within the suburban area of greater Reading and is therefore within an area where archaeological information is mostly derived from chance finds and observations. The site more generally lies on the fringes of the archaeologically rich Thames Valley though rather less is known of the use of the higher terrace areas of the Thames, which in historic times were frequently heathlands. The most significant archaeology of the higher terraces relates to the Lower Palaeolithic period (Wymer 1999).

Areas further to the east which have similar geological and topographic settings to the proposal site have been subject to several local and regional surveys. The East Berkshire Survey (Ford 1987) and Loddon Valley Survey (Ford 1997) involved intensive field survey and a synthesis of previous knowledge. These studies showed that, despite a lack of prior known archaeology, dense activity was present in prehistoric and Roman times especially for the lower gravel terraces and Upper Chalk. Fewer sites were recorded on the London Clay and Reading Beds.

*Berkshire Sites and Monuments Record*

The Berkshire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) was consulted on 6th October 2005 for a radius of 1km around the site. This produced a list of 22 records within the search radius. The entries are summarized in Appendix 1 and the locations shown on Figure 1. None of the entries lies within the site boundaries.

**Prehistoric**

Several SMR entries are for the prehistoric period. Four handaxes, a cleaver and a flake of lower Palaeolithic date have been recorded for the study area. [Fig. 1: 6, 8-11]. The finds are isolated and are mostly rolled and stained suggesting that they are derived from the gravel and therefore transported from their original place of deposition. The cleaver, though, is in a sharp condition and may have been found close to where it was deposited. One handaxe is made from quartzite which is an uncommon raw material for this region where flint is dominant.

The Mesolithic period is represented by the finding of flint cores and blades which represents a small flint scatter reflecting an occupation site [1]. Sites and finds of Mesolithic date are well represented in the Thames
and Loddon Valleys, but less so in other areas of East Berkshire where the sites are also much smaller (Ford 1987). It is likely that the site within the study area is of a similar nature.

The Neolithic period is represented by just a single entry for the findspot of a polished axe, probably made from flint [12].

Similarly, the Late Iron Age is also only represented by a single find, that of a gold coin [13].

Roman

Four entries relate to Roman material but two of these are thought to represent modern imports of antiquities and of no relevance to this study [14, 20]. The other two entries are for coins, one of which is of 4th-century date [17] and the other of 2nd-century date [19]. Of more significance is the reporting of pottery and tile in the vicinity of the findspot of the latter, thought to be of Roman date although this has not been verified and details are lacking.

Saxon

A single entry relates to the finding of a coin [15].

Medieval

Two entries relate to the medieval period. The site of the chapel of Erleigh St Batholomew lies at Erleigh Court to the north of the proposal site [2]. It is documented in the late 12th century but was eventually demolished and the stone work reused. The other entry is for a coin of Edward III [16].

Post-medieval

The post-medieval entries include the findspots of a jeton (trade token) dating from 1552–3 [18] and that of a coin hoard [7]. The coin hoard comprised 41 silver coins found within a glazed earthenware tankard and included items of Elizabeth I, James I and Charles I.

The other entries are of 19th/20th century date and comprise a brick built well [5], the Reading–Waterloo railway line and Earley station [4], and the site of the original grandstand at Palmer Park Stadium which was demolished and rebuilt in 1986 [3]. The two listed buildings comprise two lodges of Whiteknights Park well to the south of the proposal area, both grade II [21, 22].

Scheduled Ancient Monuments

There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the vicinity of the site.
Cartographic and documentary sources

Earley is first mentioned in the 11th century as *Herlei* and subsequently as *Erleye, Erle, Orle, Early, Erleigh* and *Arley* (VCH 1972). In Domesday Book (1086) Earley is contained within the entries for Charlton Hundred but was a liberty of Sonning Hundred, and two manors are documented. At the time of Edward the Confessor, Earley Regis was held by Almær from the king when it was assessed at 5 hides; after the Conquest, William held it and it was assessed at 4 hides. In the 12th–14th centuries it was held by the Earley family (Williams and Martin 2002, 140). The second manor was Earley Bartholomew which at the time of Edward the Confessor was also assessed at 5 hide and was held by Dunn, and after the conquest by Osbern Giffard when it was assessed at 2 hides (Williams and Martin 2002, 154). Earley only became a distinct ecclesiastical parish from Sonning after 1854 with the church of St Peter built in 1844 and St Bartholomew in 1879.

A range of Ordnance Survey and other historical maps of the area were consulted at Berkshire Record Office and the Local Studies Collection, Reading Central Library in order to ascertain what activity had been taking place through the later history of the site and whether this may have affected any possible archaeological deposits within the proposal area (see Appendix 2). The earliest map consulted was that of Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire in 1574 by Christopher Saxton (Fig. 3). This shows that the site lies in an area of undifferentiated countryside.

Rocque’s map of 1762 (Fig. 4) by way of contrast, shows the area in some detail. The site location can be identified from the junction of Mays Close (Lane) and Church Road. To the south the area is heathland (Earley Common) but the site lies within farmland. It is not occupied by structures or otherwise defined.

Pride’s map of 1790 shows rather less detail than Rocque and does not depict Mays Close.

The Earley Inclosure map of 1820 shows the site in more detail with the site perhaps lying within parts of two fields. A small enclosure is shown which may include the site of one or more houses but the reproduction is not clear. However, this enclosure, appears to lie within part of the site (Fig. 5).

There is no tithe map covering this area of Earley.

By the time of the First Edition Ordnance Survey (1877) several of the features of the modern day plan are present, namely construction of the railway and to the south, that of the parish church of St Peter and the Primary School. For the site, the enclosure identified on the Inclosure map is displayed clearly (Fig. 6). It is likely that much of the enclosure and the structures lie beneath the area occupied by the modern houses on Mays Close and
are therefore outside of the proposal site. However, some parts of the enclosure are likely to lie within the proposal site.

By the time of the Second Edition of the Ordnance Survey (1899), the previously identified enclosure and structures have now gone and the plot of land is incorporated within the larger field to the east. A band of trees is present. There is no change in 1911 and 1913.

By 1938 the track forming the northern boundary of the site is now in place. Two structures are shown on the site, one likely to be a house, with the second, perhaps a large shed or greenhouse (Fig. 7). The current site layout is from the 1950s with construction of the A329M just to the north in the 1970s.

Listed buildings

There are no listed buildings on or close to the proposal site.

Registered Parks and Gardens; Registered Battlefields

There are no registered parks and gardens or registered battlefields within close proximity of the site.

Aerial Photographs

The site has been within a suburban setting since before the advent of aerial photography. No aerial photographic collections have therefore been consulted.

Discussion

In considering the archaeological potential of the study area, various factors must be taken into account, including previously recorded archaeological sites, previous land-use and disturbance and future land-use including the proposed development.

The cartographic and documentary evidence has shown that the site was mostly undeveloped farmland until relatively recent times when it was largely incorporated into the rear gardens of the houses. It did partly include a small homestead mapped in 1820 but not previously.

There is no evidence of archaeological remains on or in the immediate vicinity of the site but there are a few coin finds of Iron Age and Roman date (hardly a concentration) from the allotments to the east and a broad spread of finds of prehistoric and later periods from the wider study area. There is therefore, as with any development proposal a small chance of archaeological deposits being present.
It may be necessary to provide further information about the potential of the site from field observations in order to draw up a scheme to mitigate the impact of development on any below-ground archaeological deposits if necessary. If such a scheme is requested by the archaeological advisers to the District Council a scheme for this evaluation will need to be drawn up and approved by the archaeological advisers and implemented by a competent archaeological contractor, such as an organization registered with the Institute of Field Archaeologists.

References

BCC, 1994, Berkshire Structure Plan 1991-2006, Reading
Ford, S, 1987, East Berkshire Archaeological Survey, Berkshire County Counc Dept Highways and Planning Occas Pap 1, Reading
Wymer, J J, 1999, The Lower Palaeolithic occupation of Britain, Salisbury
APPENDIX 1: Sites and Monuments Records within a 1km search radius of the development site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>SMR Ref</th>
<th>Grid Ref (SU)</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Comment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>930</td>
<td>756 727</td>
<td>Findspot</td>
<td>Mesolithic</td>
<td>Flint scatter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2125</td>
<td>746 734</td>
<td>Building</td>
<td>Medieval</td>
<td>Erlegh St Bartholomews Chapel, Earley (late 12th century)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5027</td>
<td>7390 7310</td>
<td>Building</td>
<td>Victorian</td>
<td>19th century Palmer Park Stadium Grandstand, demolished in 1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5056</td>
<td>7427 7282</td>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Victorian</td>
<td>South Eastern Railway, Reading branch, Earley station 19th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6352</td>
<td>7500 7222</td>
<td>Building</td>
<td>Victorian</td>
<td>brick built 19th century well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>921</td>
<td>755 718</td>
<td>Findspot</td>
<td>Lower Palaeolithic</td>
<td>Handaxe and flake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>957</td>
<td>7516 7190</td>
<td>Findspot</td>
<td>Post-Medieval (17th century)</td>
<td>hoard of 41 silver coins of Elizabeth, James I and Charles I in a glazed earthenware tankard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>968</td>
<td>738 726</td>
<td>Findspot</td>
<td>Lower Palaeolithic</td>
<td>rolled and stained Hand axe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>974</td>
<td>740 722</td>
<td>Findspot</td>
<td>Lower Palaeolithic</td>
<td>rolled and stained Hand axe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>975</td>
<td>743 722</td>
<td>Findspot</td>
<td>Lower Palaeolithic</td>
<td>Quartzite, rolled and stained Hand axe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>979</td>
<td>743 726</td>
<td>Findspot</td>
<td>Lower Palaeolithic</td>
<td>Cleaver sharp condition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>7449 7161</td>
<td>Findspot</td>
<td>Neolithic</td>
<td>polished axe probably flint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>2056</td>
<td>7489 7226</td>
<td>Findspot</td>
<td>Late Iron Age</td>
<td>gold coin, uninscribed quarter stater of Atrebatie type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>2087</td>
<td>74 72</td>
<td>Findspot</td>
<td>Roman</td>
<td>marble urn, probably a modern import</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>2098</td>
<td>7420 7266</td>
<td>Findspot</td>
<td>Saxon</td>
<td>Coin (Sceatta)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>2120</td>
<td>7441 7222</td>
<td>Findspot</td>
<td>Medieval</td>
<td>Coin Edward III groat (14th century)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>2165</td>
<td>750 723</td>
<td>Findspot</td>
<td>Roman</td>
<td>Coin (4th century)</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>MRM15812</td>
<td>738 732</td>
<td>Findspot</td>
<td>Post-Medieval</td>
<td>Nuremberg type Jeton, 1552-1553</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>MRM15835</td>
<td>7499 7229</td>
<td>Findspot</td>
<td>Roman</td>
<td>Coin denarius of Trajan (early 2nd century); pottery and tile also reported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>MRM15838</td>
<td>738 732</td>
<td>Findspot</td>
<td>Roman</td>
<td>2nd century Coin From Alexandria, Egypt, also probably sestertius of Trajan or Hadrian, probably a modern import</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>MRM15844</td>
<td>7427 7186</td>
<td>Listed Building</td>
<td>Victorian</td>
<td>North lodge, Grade II listed (19th century)</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>MRM15845</td>
<td>7427 7184</td>
<td>Listed Building</td>
<td>Victorian</td>
<td>South lodge, Grade II listed (19th century)</td>
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APPENDIX 2: Historic and modern maps consulted

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>1574</td>
<td>Saxton’s map of Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire (Fig. 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1762</td>
<td>John Rocque, Berkshire (Fig. 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1790</td>
<td>Thomas Pride, ‘10 miles around Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820</td>
<td>Earley Enclosure map (Fig. 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1877</td>
<td>Ordnance Survey First Edition Sheet xxxvii.8, 25&quot; (Fig. 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>Ordnance Survey Second Edition Sheet xxxvii.8, 25&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>Ordnance Survey revision Sheet xxxviii.8, 25&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Ordnance Survey revision Sheet xxxviii.NE, 6&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>Ordnance Survey Sheet Sheet xxxviii.NE, 6&quot; (Fig. 7)</td>
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Mays Close, Earley, Reading, Berkshire, 2005
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Figure 1. Location of site within Earley and Berkshire showing Sites and Monuments Record entries.

Reproduced from Ordnance Survey Pathfinder 1172 SU67/77 at 1:12500.
Ordnance Survey Licence 100025880
Figure 2. Detailed location of site on Mays Close.

Reproduced from Ordnance Survey digital mapping; Scale 1:1250
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Figure 3. Christopher Saxton, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire 1574
Figure 4. John Rocque, Berkshire, 1762
Mays Close, Earley, Reading, Berkshire, 2005
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Figure 5. Earley Inclosure Map, 1820
Figure 6. Ordnance Survey First Edition 1877
Mays Close, Earley, Reading, Berkshire, 2005
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Figure 7. Ordnance Survey 1938