Meales Farm, Sulhamstead, West Berkshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For Mr. Robert Astor

by Steve Ford
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code CHH02/29

May 2002
Summary

Site name: Meales Farm, Sulhamstead, West Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 6385 6845

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 10th–13th May 2002

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Steve Ford

Site code: MFS02/34

Area of site: -

Summary of results: None

Monuments identified: None

Location and reference of archive: The site archive is currently held by Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd, 47-49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5NR. The complete archive will be deposited with West Berkshire Museum Service in due course

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Report 02/34

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at Meales Farm, Sulhamstead, Reading, West Berkshire (SU6385 6845) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Robert Astor of Abbots Farm Cottage, Sulhamstead, Reading, RG7 4ED.

Planning consent (00/01282) has been granted by West Berkshire Council for the demolition of an existing barn and the erection of a new detached house. The planning consent was subject to a condition requiring the implementation of a programme of archaeological works in the form of a watching brief. This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment’s Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990) and the Council’s policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Ms Veronica Fiorato, Heritage Officer of West Berkshire Heritage Service. The fieldwork was undertaken by Steve Ford on the 10th and 13th May 2002 and the site code is MFS02/34.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located at Meales Farm which is an isolated settlement to the east of Sulhamstead. It is sited on a ridge at a height of c. 93m above Ordnance Datum. The underlying geology consists of plateau gravel (BGS 1946), which was confirmed in the trenches observed on site. The areas surrounding the farm have been subject to gravel extraction.

Archaeological background

A brief for the site prepared by Ms Veronica Fiorato of West Berkshire Heritage Service has highlighted the potential of the site. Meales Farm is thought to have been the location of a medieval Manor House, documented from at least the 1400s and that there had been a church present from as early as AD1193. Excavations prior to gravel extraction immediately to the east of the farm (Fig. 2) revealed a large series of archaeological features mostly representing Roman and medieval paddocks but with some evidence of medieval buildings and pits. A small amount of prehistoric (late Bronze Age) activity was also recorded. (Lobb *et al.*, 1990).


Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits that would be damaged or destroyed by the new groundworks.

Results

Following demolition, superficial levels of made ground and the ground slab of the former barn were removed. The foundations were dug to variable widths. The two main foundation trenches located down the centre of the new structure were 1.3m wide and were dug to a depth of 1m (Fig. 3). This revealed a simple stratigraphic sequence comprising 0.6m of stoney humic soil overlying the plateau gravel, which was dug into by 0.4m. At the northern end of the trenches a large modern rubbish pit was identified. The foundation trenches around the margins of the structure were dug using a 1m wide bucket to the same depth. Internal foundations were dug using a 0.6m wide bucket.

A number of ‘subsoil hollows’ were observed penetrating the natural geology. These were filled with stoney, humic soil. However, following examination they are best interpreted as root holes, and none are thought to represent archaeological deposits. None produced any artefacts.

A test pit had been dug adjacent to the wall of the retained barn to the south, measuring c. 0.8 x 1.5m and dug to a depth of c. 0.5m. This did not expose the natural gravel and no finds were recorded.

Finds

A few animal bones of dog (from a burial) and sheep were recovered from the subsoil deposits above the gravel as were various objects of late post-medieval date such as pottery, brick and tile and unidentified metal items. None of these finds were retained.

Conclusion

There were no archaeological features or finds observed during the groundworks from this site.

References

Lobb, S, Mees, G and Mepham, L, 1990, ‘Meales Farm, Sulhamstead, archaeological investigation of Romano- British and medieval features 1985-7’, Berkshire Archaeol, J, 73, (for 1986–90), 54-65
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Figure 1. Location of site within Sulhampstead and West Berkshire.

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Figure 2. Location of site within Meales Farm.
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Figure 3. Trenches observed during watching brief.