Smallford Campus, Oaklands College, St Albans, Hertfordshire

An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment

for Oaklands College

by Steve Ford

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code OCH04/82a

October 2004
Summary

Site name: Smallford Campus, Oaklands College, St Albans, Hertfordshire

Grid reference: TL 185 080

Site activity: Desk-based assessment

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Steve Ford

Site code: OCH 04/82a

Area of site: 118ha

Summary of results: The study revealed a modest range of sites or finds within the study area with one and possibly three areas of interest within the site itself. From this and the large size of the proposal area, it is concluded that the site has high archaeological potential.

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Introduction

This desk-based study is an assessment of the archaeological potential of an irregular plot of land located to the east of St Albans, Hertfordshire (Fig. 1) (TL 185 080). The project was commissioned by Mr Piers Cartwright-Taylor of GVA Grimley, 10 Stratton Street, London, W1J 8JR on behalf of Oaklands College 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 is located on the eastern margins of the city (Figs 1 and 2). The site is bounded wholly or partly by two roads, namely Hatfield Road to the south and Oaklands Lane to the north and east. The boundary to the north-east is a backfilled sand and gravel quarry and to the south-east a south-flowing stream and woodland belt with paddocks beyond. The western boundary is formed by various properties and school playing fields. During a site visit on the 28th September 2004, it was noted that the site comprised farmland surrounding the Oaklands College complex. The site in total occupies 118 ha of which the built area is 14ha. The farmland comprises a mix of arable and grassland with several areas of woodland. In the vicinity of the college buildings, which stand towards the centre of the site, land use includes areas of horse paddock and a small golf course. A number of groups of houses are present elsewhere on the site.

The northern part of the site gently slopes northwards down to a height of approximately 77m above Ordnance Datum. The remainder of the site is fairly level and lies at a height of approximately 85m above OD. The underlying geology is Boulder Clay with gravel on the northern and eastern margins (BGS 1978).

Planning background and development proposals

Planning permission is to be sought from The City and District of St Albans to redevelop the site. Currently there are no details for the development proposal.

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.’

Further guidance is provided by the Hertfordshire Structure Plan Review 1991–2011, which lists

‘vii) Scheduled Ancient Monuments and other archaeological remains of both national and more local importance, and their setting;
‘viii) Listed buildings and their settings and other buildings of architectural, archaeological or historic merit; and
‘ix) Conservation Areas’

as ‘Critical Capital’ which will be given appropriate protection.

The St Albans City and District Local Plan (SALP 1994) takes a similar stance. Policy 109 states:

‘Planning applications for development which would adversely affect a Scheduled Ancient Monument, as defined on the proposals map and listed below, will be refused on archaeological grounds unless prior scheduled monument consent has been obtained from the Secretary of State for the Environment. If scheduled monument consent has been granted, the District Council will
seek to preserve the amenity of ancient monuments by resisting proposals within scheduled areas which would detract from their character…”

Policy 110 states:

‘Planning permission will not be granted for development which would adversely affect the remains within, or the character of, the sites for local preservation as defined on the proposals map and listed below. Development may be permitted in exceptional circumstances, following evaluation, if the Council is satisfied that important remains would not be destroyed or the character of the site adversely affected. The evaluation, which may involve limited excavation or other work (eg. geophysical survey) is to be carried out by the Council or an archaeologist approved by the Council. Planning permissions will normally be subject to conditions requiring facilities for the Council to record remains by excavation in advance of construction and/or during construction.

‘Voluntary agreements will be sought (eg. under section 106) to cover the cost of work, including any initial evaluation, and to ensure that finds made during the course of such work are donated to the Council. Voluntary agreements will also be sought to ensure the continued preservation and management of important remains.’

Policy 111 states:

‘Within the sites listed below and defined on the Proposals Map, the District Council will not normally refuse planning applications on archaeological grounds. However, following evaluation, planning permissions may be subjected to a condition requiring facilities for the Council to record remains by excavation in advance of construction and/or during construction. The evaluation, which may involve limited excavation or other work (eg. geophysical survey) is to be carried out by the Council or an archaeologist approved by the Council. ‘Voluntary agreements will be sought (eg. under section 106) to cover the cost of work, including any initial evaluation, and to ensure that finds made during the course of such work are donated to the Council.’

The site does not lie within an Area of Archaeological Significance within the District.

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 Hertfordshire Sites and Monuments Record, geological maps and any relevant publications or reports.

Archaeological background

General background

The site mostly lies on a geological outcrop (boulder clay) which is not noted for its rich archaeological heritage, though this is more likely to be due to the lack of responsiveness of the soil in the formation of cropmarks visible from the air. Earlier prehistoric remains are extremely scarce in Hertfordshire as a whole, but recent overviews consider that for the Iron Age in Hertfordshire at least, there is an expansion of the settled area onto the margins
of the boulder clay (Bryant, 1997, 25). Systematic surveys of large areas, such as within the city of Milton Keynes almost routinely locate Iron Age settlement on similar clay land areas (Williams 1993; Zeepvat 1991).

By the late Iron Age, St Albans was a major centre of the type known as an *oppidum*, called *Verlamion* (Bryant and Niblett 1997, Haselgrove and Millett, 1997). These settlement complexes often spread over large areas with concentrations of industrial, ritual and settlement activity within boundaries usually defined by earthworks or natural features such as a marsh or river, set within a hinterland of smaller farms and enclosures. The limits of the *oppidum* as currently known could potentially extend so far east as to reach the site, but even if not formally within it, the land would certainly have been within its sphere of influence. Finds of late Iron Age date are known in a wide arc around the modern city.

The site lies within the hinterland of the Roman town of *Verulamium* which stood just to the west of the modern day St Albans. *Verulamium* was a major Roman town, the capital and administrative centre of the civitas of the Catuvelauni, possibly also rising to *municipium* status. While the town was the subject of pioneering archaeological work by, *inter alios*, Mortimer Wheeler (summarized by Wacher 1995, 214–241) so that it has one of the best-known of Roman town plans, less is known of the surrounding area than in some other areas and less recent work has been done here than in many other major Roman towns. Given the importance of the town, it is reasonably anticipated, that the environs would have been well settled and farmed during Roman times. It is also quite common for Roman cemeteries to be located alongside major routes into towns, just outside their boundaries.

Late Roman and Saxon St Albans remain under-represented compared to the earlier periods. A pre-Conquest origin for the medieval town is assumed, but it cannot as yet be pushed much earlier with great conviction (Ayers 1997). The medieval period in the area is dominated by the Abbey, consecrated by Henry I in 1116.

**Hertfordshire Sites and Monuments Record**

A search of the Hertfordshire Sites and Monuments Records (SMR) was made on the 10th September 2004, covering a 500m radius around the site. This revealed 14 entries within the study area. Two entries lie within the development area itself. A possible cropmark site has been identified by this study which is not within the SMR. The results from this search are listed in Appendix 1, and summarized below, with the locations plotted on Figure 1.

The entries are of a range of dates though most are of later post-medieval/modern date.
Early Bronze Age

The only early prehistoric entry within the study area is that for the findspot of a barbed and tanged arrowhead [Fig. 1: 2].

Late Iron Age/Roman

Four entries relate to this period. Of most significance is the presence of a rectangular cropmark enclosure and other features visible from the air within the eastern margins of the site [4]. The cropmark has been examined by several stages of evaluation and confirmed by trial trenching as a certain archaeological site with a ditch revealed containing late Iron Age and Roman pottery (GB 1997; Haverbrook, 1997a and b).

Another complex of cropmarks visible from the air thought to represent a field system and trackways was present to the north of the site but now lies within a developed area [14]. No investigation prior to development was made but on morphological grounds, these features are likely to represent an Iron Age/Roman site. Two observations made to the west of the site revealed deposits of pottery, charcoal, coins, etc. of Late Iron Age/Roman [1] and Roman [3] date. Although the observations were of limited extent, it is likely that these deposits represent occupation sites.

Medieval?/early Post-Medieval

A single entry on the eastern fringes of the study area relates to a lobby-entrance house mostly of 17th century date [12]. However, some parts of the building suggest the presence of an earlier structure. The building is listed (grade II). A farm or settlement is located on the site on a map of 1749 (and later maps) called ‘Three Houses’ and which may have late medieval origins [16]. It is likely to have been sited close to the current college buildings.

Modern

The remaining entries are all of 19th or 20th century date. Three entries relate to milestones made of cast iron [5, 6, 7] one to a post box [8], one to the site of a Second World War defence of Britain pill box [11], one to a road bridge [10] and two relating to a former railway line including a former station [9, 13].

Undated

A probable cropmark enclosure identified by this study has been located within the boundaries of the site [15].
Scheduled Ancient Monuments

There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments located within the boundaries, or within the immediate environs, of the site.

Cartographic and documentary sources

A range of Ordnance Survey and other historical maps of the area were consulted at Hertfordshire Record Office in order to ascertain what activity had been taking place throughout the site’s later history and whether this may have affected any possible archaeological deposits within the proposal area (see Appendix 2).

The earliest map available of the area is Saxton’s map of Hertfordshire, 1577 (Fig. 3). For this small scale map few details are shown and the location of the site can be identified only approximately. The site area is not mentioned by name. Other small scale county maps by Seller (1676), Oliver (1695) and Warburton (1749), similarly provide no detail for the area of the site though the southern boundary, the Hatfield Road is depicted on all three maps. Of note is the presence of a settlement called ‘Three Houses’ on Warburton’s map which appears to lie within the site (see below).

Dury and Andrews’ map of Hertfordshire, 1766 (Fig. 4) provides much more detail for the environs of the site. The majority of the site boundaries are readily identifiable with Hatfield Road and Oaklands Lane shown, the stream to the east and a field boundary to the north (which now forms the boundary of the site with the gravel workings). The western boundary is less clear cut but a field boundary to the north-west is depicted and is likely to be the site boundary. Of particular note is the presence of a farm (?) called ‘Three Houses’ with a driveway to the south which corresponds approximately with the current drive to the college. This collection of structures is mostly likely to lie within the built area of the college. The surrounding land is depicted mostly as in arable use but with pasture and woodland present. The woodland does not correspond to the woodland now present on the site.

The tithe map of St Albans St Peter’s in 1838 (Fig. 5) shows much detail recognizable on the present day maps. Three Houses is now named as Oaklands Farm.

The Second Edition Ordnance Survey map, 1898 (Fig. 6) shows the environs of the site in detail. The house is named Oaklands and comprises a large house with several ancillary structures approached by a drive from Hatfield Road. Overall more woodland and more field subdivisions are present than on the more recent maps but no ancillary buildings such as estate workers’ or keepers’ cottages are indicated. The southern area of the site between Oaklands and the Hatfield Road is depicted as parkland.
There is little change on the 1924 Ordnance Survey map (not illustrated).

By 1937 the estate has been taken over by the Oaklands Agricultural Institute with much change to the layout present (Fig. 7). Much of the former parkland has been converted into small fields and some woodland has been removed. An area to the north of the buildings has now been planted as an orchard. A further complex of buildings has been constructed also to the north of the original core along with what appears to be a large glasshouse. Some estate workers’ cottages have been constructed towards the eastern margins of the site.

In subsequent years further changes to field layout have taken place, particularly south of the main building complex and further estate workers’ cottages have been built towards the east. Various new structures are present within the main building complex.

Documentary Sources

No documentary sources have been found which relate specifically to the history of this parcel of land. Historically, the site lay within the parish of St Peter which included further chapelries which became separate parishes in the 14th century (VCH 1908, 264). The parish of St Peter appears to have been redefined in the early part of the 20th century with the site now lying within the parish of Colney Heath. For tithing purposes, the proceeds were collected by St Peters. The manor was known as Newland Squillers in the 15th century and Newlane subsequently and was bought by the Abbot of St Albans in the early 15th century.

St Albans itself was not a large town in Domesday Book (AD1086), assessed at just 10 hides, although the church of St Albans was a major landholder. It is unclear in which manor or demesne the site may have fallen in this period.

Listed buildings

There are no Listed Buildings on the site. One grade II listed structure is recorded for the eastern margins of the study area (Appendix 1).

Registered Parks and Gardens; Registered Battlefields

There are no registered parks, gardens or battlefields located on or within the close vicinity of the site.
Aerial Photographs
A search was made of the English Heritage aerial photographic collection on 17th September 2004. This revealed five specialist (oblique) photographs and 71 vertical prints for the area taken between 1946 and 1992. One vertical photograph taken by the RAF on 31st August 1954 (RAF/82/1006 frame 170) shows a sub-rectangular cropmark approximately 65m x 40m in extent possibly with an entrance to the east. The cropmark does not appear to coincide with any known structures or field boundaries shown on historic maps and appears likely to be a site of genuine archaeological interest.

The Cambridge University Collection had no coverage for the area.

Historic Hedgerows
Many of the hedges present on the site are also indicated as boundaries on the various historic maps, such as the Tithe map of 1838. These do not, however, meet the archaeological or historical criteria for definition as ‘historically important’ under Part Two of Schedule 1 of The Hedgerows Regulations 1997.

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 evidence indicates that the site does not lie within or close to any historic centres of population but does include a farm identified on 18th-century maps located in the vicinity of the present Oaklands College core buildings, and which may have late medieval origins. The Sites and Monuments Record revealed relatively little of archaeological interest in the study area, considering the size of the site and the area searched, but with a thin scatter of prehistoric, Roman and post-medieval material present. The site does not contain any Scheduled Ancient Monuments but does contain an area of cropmarks visible from the air which have been confirmed by fieldwork as representing Iron Age/Roman settlement. A second cropmark visible from the air may also indicate the presence of an archaeological site but the interpretation and date of this would need to be confirmed by fieldwork before further significance is attached to this location.

Statistically, there is a chance of archaeological deposits being present on almost any site, despite any lack of positive evidence pre-existing, such as can be assessed by a desktop study. As the site area is increased, so the chances of encountering an archaeological site increase proportionately. For the proposal site with an area of
118ha, several sites should be anticipated in addition to those already recorded. For example, in a survey of the adjoining county of Bedfordshire, which has a similar range of geological outcrops and topography to that within Hertfordshire and the proposal area, a density of Roman settlements alone of up to two sites per square kilometre is recorded (Simco 1984). The density recorded for Bedfordshire does not include sites of other periods nor include the results of any intensive fieldwork. On the basis of its extent, it has to be considered therefore that this site overall has high archaeological potential.

Further work in the form of a field evaluation will be necessary to determine to what extent archaeological deposits are present across the site as a whole. It will also be necessary to determine the extent of the known site and confirm the existence of the possible cropmark site so that preservation in situ of archaeological deposits can be achieved by sympathetic design layout.

The scheme for an evaluation, which may be able to utilize a range of both invasive and non-invasive techniques, will need to be drawn up and approved by the archaeological adviser to the local planning authority and implemented by a competent archaeological contractor, such as an Organization Registered with the Institute of Field Archaeologists, approved by the Council. The information provided by the fieldwork can then be used to draw up a mitigation strategy to minimize the effects of development on any archaeological deposits, particularly with an input to any design layout.

References
BCAS 1997, Oaklands College, Archaeological Field Evaluation, Bedfordshire County Archaeology Service, Bedford
Havercroft, A, 1997a, Land at Oaklands, Hatfield, Hertfordshire, Archaeological evaluation phase 1-fieldwalking, Guildhouse Consulting, St Albans
Havercroft, A, 1997b, Land at Oaklands, Hatfield, Hertfordshire, Archaeological evaluation phase 2-fieldwalking (area 7), Guildhouse Consulting, St Albans,
SALP, 1994, City and District of St Albans Local Plan, November 1994, St Albans
Simco, A, 1984, Survey of Bedfordshire, The Roman Period, RCHME/ Bedfordshire County Council
Williams, R J, 1993, Pennylands and Hartigans, Two Iron Age and Saxon Sites in Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire Archaeol Soc Monogr 4 (Aylesbury)
### APPENDIX 1: Sites and Monuments Records within a 1km search radius of the development site

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<td>1688 0748</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>1749 0855</td>
<td>Arrowhead</td>
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<td>Barbed and tanged</td>
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<td>672</td>
<td>1766 0714</td>
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<td>2666</td>
<td>1898 0782</td>
<td>Enclosure</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>9492</td>
<td>2007 0799</td>
<td>Building</td>
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<td>Lobby-entrance house. Listed Grade II: with relict traces of an earlier structure</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>182 077</td>
<td>Farm</td>
<td>Late or post-medieval</td>
<td>‘Three Houses’, on map of 1749</td>
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APPENDIX 2: Historic and modern maps consulted

1577  Saxton’s map of Hertfordshire (Fig. 3)
1676  Seller’s map of Hertfordshire
1695  Oliver’s map of Hertfordshire
1749  Warburton’s map of Hertfordshire
1766  Dury and Andrews’ map of Hertfordshire (Fig. 4)
1838  St Peter’s, Tithe map (Fig. 5)
1898  Second Edition Ordnance Survey XXXV.5 and XXV.9 25” (Fig. 6)
1924  Ordnance Survey XXXV.5 and XXV.9 25”
1937/9  Ordnance Survey XXXV.5 and XXV.9 25” (Fig. 7)
APPENDIX 3: Catalogue of aerial photographs consulted.

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NGR given is for start of run; where multiple frames are listed these could be spread over a wide area.
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Figure 1. Location of site within St Albans and Hertfordshire showing SMR entries.

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Figure 2. Site plan
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Figure 3. Saxton’s map of Hertfordshire, 1577
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Figure 4. Dury and Andrew’s map of Hertfordshire, 1766
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Figure 5. St Alban’s St Peter’s Tithe, 1838

SITE
(boundary approximate and drawn to follow identifiable boundaries)
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Figure 6. Second Edition Ordnance Survey 1898
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Figure 7. Ordnance Survey, 1937/9