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SUMMARY

In January 1999 Cotswold Archaeological Trust was commissioned by Mr Paul Chadwick of CgMs Consulting on behalf of the Spencers Wood Consortium to undertake an archaeological evaluation on land at Spencers Wood, Reading, Berkshire. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the depth and preservation of archaeological deposits within an area that is, amongst other sites, being considered for residential development as part of the Wokingham District Local Plan Review.

Nine evaluation trenches were excavated in areas previously subjected to geophysical survey. An undated posthole and a ditch dating to the post-medieval or modern period were identified in two separate trenches.
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This report presents the results of an archaeological evaluation conducted between the 18th and 20th January and the 11th and 12th February 1999 at Spencers Wood, Reading, Berkshire (centred on NGR SU 715 675) (Fig. 1). The evaluation was required to provide sufficient information to assess the potential archaeological implications of selected parts of the development site.

1.1.2 The evaluation was conducted in compliance with the Standard and Guidance of Archaeological Evaluations (IFA 1997) and the Management of Archaeological Projects (MAP 2) issued by English Heritage (1991). The Project Design was submitted to, and approved by, Babtie Public Services, acting for Wokingham District Council prior to the commencement of fieldwork.

1.2 Geology, Topography, and Landuse

1.2.1 The underlying geology of the site comprises London Clay (BGS 1979) overlain in places by River Terrace Deposits (BGS 1977). The site occupies a low ridge running south-west to north east between Foudry Brook and the River Loddon, between heights of 40m and 70m OD.

1.2.2 The site is approximately triangular in shape with its apex at the M4 (Junction 11)/A33. To the west the site is bounded by the A33 Swallowfield Bypass, to the south by various roads and hedgelines, and to the east by Hyde End Lane, Ryeish Green. The site comprises a mix of land uses including horse paddocks, grazed pasture, and woodland and comprises 229ha.
1.3 **Archaeological Background**

1.3.1 Prior to this trench based field evaluation, an archaeological assessment and a programme of geophysical survey work (magnetometer scanning, magnetic susceptibility sampling and more detailed magnetometer survey, supplemented by further magnetic susceptibility work and a sample resistivity survey) was undertaken by Stratascan on behalf of CgMs Consulting. A full consideration of the archaeological potential of the site is contained within the Environmental Statement Technical Appendices Volume 4. Only a brief summary is therefore provided here.

**Prehistoric**

1.3.2 The possibility of lithics (worked, waste, and burnt flint) of Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age date occurring in the topsoil was identified along with a possibility of cut features. However, although the geophysical survey would not detect further artefacts, it should have located any sub-surface features evincing settlement or funerary monuments if they are present. Accordingly, although one or more low density scatters of prehistoric lithics can still be anticipated within the site, it now appears unlikely that associated sites occur on any significant scale.

**Romano-British**

1.3.3 A possible Roman Road alignment crossing the application site and a stray find of Roman pottery recovered from Spencers Wood hinted at the presence of further remains of this period. However, again, the geophysical scanning and subsequent survey did not locate features of a character likely to belong to this period and the low density/absence of Roman material from adjacent areas fieldwalked by the Loddon Valley Survey suggests that sites of this period are unlikely to be present.

**Anglo-Saxon**

1.3.4 Although a Saxon spearhead has been found at Spencers Wood, the context of this find remains unclear. In the absence of other evidence, the likelihood of
further finds of this period appears remote.

**Medieval**

1.3.5 A medieval occupation site, comprising perhaps a farmstead or barn, is recorded in the County SMR close to the southern boundary of the proposed development. The geophysical survey identified traces of parallel cultivation marks in this same area along with a rectangular feature which may be of archaeological interest. Accordingly, the prospect of a localised area of medieval occupation with associated agricultural evidence is identified.

**Post-Medieval to Modern**

1.3.6 The post-medieval period is characterised by the enclosure of the agricultural landscape and the slow growth of settlement at Three Mile Cross and Spencers Wood. Little of archaeological interest relating to this period occurs within the application site. Of more recent date, pill boxes and a possible infilled anti-tank ditch occur across the western edge of the application site, representing part of a Second World War strategic defence line.

1.4 **Methodology**

1.4.1 The aim of the evaluation was to examine a number of anomalies identified by geophysical survey and to establish whether these anomalies related to archaeological features and, if so, to establish their extent, date, character, condition, significance, and quality. It also sought to establish the presence or absence of the Roman Road underneath or alongside an extant hedgeline and to identify any archaeological features not indicated by the geophysical survey.

1.4.2 All recording was undertaken in accordance with the CAT Technical Manual 1; *Site Recording Manual*. All artefacts recovered were retained for processing and analysis in accordance with the CAT Technical Manual; *Treatment of Finds immediately after Excavation* and are listed in Appendix 1. The finds will be deposited, with the landowners’ consent, with Reading
2. EVALUATION RESULTS

General

2.1 Nine trenches were excavated in the positions shown (Fig. 2). Due to severe waterlogging in area 3, trenches 3.4 and 3.5 were moved from the location specified in the project design (CAT 1998), whilst trench 3.6 could not be excavated at all. All trenches were machine cut to a length of 20m and a width of 1.5m. Work in Area 4 was postponed pending a review of the Area of Archaeological Potential by the District Council.

Area 1

2.2 Trenches 1.1 and 1.2 were located over a number of linear higher resistance anomalies (Fig. 3). The trenches were excavated to depths of between 0.25m and 0.35m where the natural substrate (102) and (202) comprising a medium to dark red-brown sandy gravel was exposed. Cutting the natural substrate 1.0m from the south-west end of trench 1.2 was posthole [203]. This feature was 0.28m in diameter and 0.16m deep, with steeply sloping sides and a concave base (Fig. 6). The fill (204) a dark grey-brown silty sand was rich in charcoal but did not contain any dating evidence. It was covered by the plough soil (201). Trench 1.1 was devoid of archaeological features. The natural substrate was of variable character and appeared to have been subjected to peri-glacial activity. It appears likely that the anomalies identified in the geophysical survey resulted from these geological phenomenon. The posthole was not identified by the geophysical survey.

Area 2

2.3 Both trenches were located on anomalies identified by magnetometer survey. Trench 2.1 was positioned to examine a large sub-circular anomaly, whilst trench 2.2 was centred on a curvi-linear feature (Fig. 5). Excavation revealed a natural substrate (402) and (304) comprising an orange-yellow silty clay at depths of between 0.25m and 0.35m. The eastern end of trench 2.1 had been
subject to tree root disturbance which may account for the anomaly identified by the geophysical survey. In both the trenches the natural substrate was covered by ploughsoil (401) and (301). Excavation of trench 2.2 identified the curvi-linear feature located by the geophysical survey. This feature [302] was 3.50m in width and 0.50m in depth and had gently sloping sides (Fig. 6). The feature was cut through the ploughsoil (301). Excavation of the lower fill (305), a medium grey-brown clay silt, produced fragments of brick. While the material recovered from the upper fill (303), which comprised a medium grey-brown clay silt, was largely of a nineteenth to twentieth-century date. This evidence would suggest that the ditch was open until recent times and is therefore likely to be of post-medieval or modern date.

**Area 3**

2.4 The natural substrate was variable in character being a medium brown orange sandy gravel to the west and comprising a medium yellow-orange silty clay toward the centre of the area in the vicinity of trenches 3.4, 3.5, and 3.6. This latter substrate coincides with the area of waterlogging. The natural substrate was encountered at depths of between 0.25m and 0.40m and was overlain by a dark brown-grey clay silt plough soil. Trenches 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 were located to explore the postulated route of the Roman road running between Silchester and Verulamium as indicated by hedgelines in the vicinity of the study area. A linear feature [503] was located 2.0m from the western end of trench 3.3 (Fig. 6). The feature was 1.20m in width and 0.50m in depth with steeply sloping sides. The primary fill (505) comprised a medium grey sandy gravel this was overlain by a medium grey silty sand secondary fill (504). Both were archaeologically sterile and the feature appeared to be the result of peri-glacial activity. Trenches 3.1 and 3.2 were devoid of archaeological features. Trenches 3.4 and 3.5 were located to examine areas of general higher resistance (Fig. 4). Unfortunately, due to the waterlogging of the site, trench 3.5 had to be relocated away from the anomaly, while trench 3.6, which was centred on a general area of magnetic disturbance could not be excavated at all. No archaeological features were observed in either trench 3.4 or 3.5.
3 ASSESSMENT OF RESULTS

3.1 An undated posthole and a ditch dating to the post-medieval or modern period in Areas 1 and 2 respectively were the only archaeological features identified during the course of the evaluation. The results therefore suggest that many of the anomalies identified by the geophysical survey were the result of non-archaeological factors such as geological variation and tree root disturbance. A Second World War military camp in the wood to the north of Area 3, as recalled by the landowner (Taylor pers comm), may also be a complicating factor. Military activity, in the form of discarded ferrous equipment and munitions, may explain the magnetic anomalies identified in this area.

3.2 It also appears that the Roman road linking Silchester and Verulamium is not in the position suggested by the hedgeline evidence, although, it may lie elsewhere within the study area.

3.3 The archaeological evaluation has achieved the aims set out in the Project Design. The extent and character of potential archaeological deposits (as indicated by documentary sources and geophysical survey) has been assessed in three selected areas within the broader study area. This information will allow the impact of the proposed development to be gauged and appropriate measures to be taken.

4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Fieldwork was carried out by Laurent Coleman, Mark Brett, and Tim Havard. This report was compiled by Laurent Coleman and the illustrations prepared by Pete Moore and David Kenyon.
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Figure 1 Location plan
Figure 2 Trench location plan
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APPENDIX 1

Finds List

Tr1, u/s  1 copper alloy button

Tr9, u/s  1 glazed red earthenware pottery sherd (2g), 19th century

(303)  1 English stoneware pottery sherd (242g), 19-20th century
         2 white vessel glass sherds (9g)
         1 clear glass lid [JOHN KILNER... WAKEFIELD
         1 clear glass bottle fragment THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE ...[COMPANY READING]
         2 glass bottle bases (1 clear, 1 brown)
         1 brick fragment (31g)
         1 slate fragment (7g)

(305)  4 brick fragments (392g)
Detailed geophysical survey (1:1250)

Figure 4. Area 3: Location of trenches in relation to

Figure 3. Area 1: Location of trenches in relation to
FIG. 5  Area 2: Location of trenches in relation to

Survey area of scan

Trench 2.1

Trench 2.2

Area of magnetic disturbance
Fig. 6  Trench plans and sections

Section B (1:20)

Trench 3.3

Section C (1:50)

Trench 2.2

Section A (1:20)

Trench 1.2