23 Castle Hill
Berkhamsted
Hertfordshire

Archaeological Strip, Map & Sample
Excavation and Watching Brief

for
Thompson Bradford Architects Ltd
on behalf of
Mr & Mrs N Phelps

CA Project: 660167
CA Report: 14301

July 2014
23 Castle Hill
Berkhamsted
Hertfordshire

Archaeological Excavation

CA Project: 660167
CA Report: 14301

<table>
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<tr>
<th>prepared by</th>
<th>James Coyne, Project Supervisor</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>checked by</th>
<th>Nicola Powell, Post-Excavation Manager</th>
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<tr>
<th>approved by</th>
<th>Simon Carlyle, Principal Fieldwork Manager</th>
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SUMMARY

Project Name: 23 Castle Hill, Berkhamsted
Location: Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire
NGR: SP 9923 0855
Type: SMS Excavation and Watching Brief
Date: 15-19 May, 2 and 10 June 2014
Planning Reference: 4/00496/13/FHA
Location of Archive: Dacorum Heritage Trust
Site Code: CAH 13

In May 2014, Cotswold Archaeology carried out an archaeological strip, map & sample excavation at 23 Castle Hill, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire. This was followed by an archaeological watching brief in June of the same year. The work, which was commissioned by Thompson Bradford Architects Ltd, acting on behalf of Mr and Mrs N Phelps, was undertaken to fulfil a condition attached to planning consent for the demolition of an existing dwelling and the erection of a new house on the site.

Other than the foundations of the demolished 20th-century house and features associated with planting in the former garden, no features or deposits of archaeological interest were observed during groundworks and there was no artefactual material pre-dating the modern period in the excavated spoil.


1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 In May 2014, Cotswold Archaeology (CA) carried out an archaeological strip, map & sample (SMS) excavation at 23 Castle Hill, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire (site centred on NGR: SP 9923 0855; Fig. 1). This was followed by an archaeological watching brief in June of the same year. The work, which was commissioned by Thompson Bradford Architects Ltd, acting on behalf of Mr and Mrs N Phelps, was undertaken to fulfil a condition attached to planning consent for the demolition of an existing dwelling and the erection of a five bedroom house on the site (planning ref: 4/02411/13/FUL, Condition 8).

1.2 The condition for the programme of archaeological investigation and recording was attached to planning consent on the advice of Kate Batt, Hertfordshire County Council’s Historic Environment Advisor (HCCHEA), archaeological advisor to Dacorum Borough Council. The scope of works was determined through consultation with HCCHEA and detailed in a subsequent Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) produced by CA (2014).

1.3 The project was carried out in accordance with the WSI (CA 2014) and followed the Institute for Archaeologists’ (IfA) Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief (IfA 2009) and the English Heritage procedural documents Management of Archaeological Projects 2 (EH1991) and Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE): Project Manager’s Guide (EH 2006).

The site

1.4 The site is located at 23 Castle Hill, c. 800m to the north of Berkhamsted town centre and c. 300m to the west of the medieval motte-and-bailey castle. Generally, the ground slopes relatively steeply to the south-east, with the site lying close to the 130m Ordnance Survey contour. It comprises a triangular plot of land, c. 0.16ha in extent, which was formerly occupied by a two-storey house with a driveway, garage and surrounding garden.

1.5 The site lies on the geological boundary between the undifferentiated Cretaceous rocks of the Lewes Nodular Chalk Formation/Seaford Chalk Formation and the Holywell Nodular Chalk Formation/New Pit Chalk Formation. On the higher ground
to the north-west the chalk is overlain by superficial deposits of Clay-with-Flints (www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex, accessed 3 October 2013).

Archaeological background

1.6 Reference to the Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER) has identified several archaeological sites nearby, the majority of which date to the Roman and medieval periods. The site is located within an Area of Archaeological Significance (no. 21, Berkhamsted), as described in the Dacorum Borough Local Plan.

1.7 A large prehistoric bank and ditch known as Grim’s Ditch, which may have marked the boundary between tribal areas, is located on the high ground on the north side of the Bulbourne Valley, approximately 1km to the north-east of the site. Later prehistoric remains, dating to the Late Iron Age and extending into the early Roman period, were found during the construction of Bridgewater Middle School in the 1970s. The settlement remains included two lengths of ditch, four 1st-century AD cremation burials and four shaft furnaces. The area was an important centre for iron production in the Iron Age and Roman periods and it is likely that the settlement was part of a larger iron-working complex.

1.8 Berkhamsted is situated on the route of a major Roman road, known as Akeman Street, which linked Watling Street to the Fosse Way. In the vicinity of Berkhamsted it passed along the valley of the River Bulbourne, along the line of modern High Street. Chance discoveries of Roman pottery, pottery kilns and other finds have been found in the vicinity of Castle Hill Avenue and High Street, suggesting that there may have been a small settlement in the area at this time or a ribbon of dwellings and small industrial sites along the road. The remains of a Roman building (Scheduled Monument HT88) lie close to New Road, c. 300m to the east of the site and a Roman villa has been investigated at Northchurch, c. 1.8km to the north-west.

1.9 The earliest documentary reference to Berkhamsted dates to the 10th century, when it is referred to in the Will of Aelfgifu, and according to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle it was at Berkhamsted that the English thegns submitted to William the Conqueror. The original timber and earth motte-and-bailey castle, which was probably built by William’s half-brother Robert, Count of Mortain in the decade after the Conquest, was enlarged and provided with stone walls and internal buildings throughout the 12th and 13th centuries. For a time, in the 14th century, the castle was used to imprison John II, King of France, following his capture at the Battle of Poitiers in
1356. The current site lies to the west of the castle but outside of the medieval borough, in an area that was probably farmland or woodland at this time.

1.10 Approximately 230m to the west of the site is Berkhamsted Place, which was the location, until its demolition in 1967, of an Elizabethan house. The house was built by Sir Edward Carey, Keeper of the Queens Jewels, from building stone taken from the castle.

1.11 The area of the current site was farmland until the latter half of the 20th century.

Archaeological objectives

1.12 The general objective of the SMS excavation and of the watching brief was, with the resources available, to investigate and record any archaeological features or deposits that may be encountered within the footprint of the new house (Fig. 2).

1.13 There was no known archaeology within the site, but there was potential for archaeological remains, particularly dating to the Roman period, to lie within its bounds. Therefore, the specific objective of the project was to determine if Roman settlement and activity extended into this area, characterise its nature and determine if Roman pottery production was undertaken within or near the site. This was to be achieved through the identification of structures associated with pottery production (e.g. kilns) or the recovery of industrial waste (e.g. waster dumps, kiln waste).

1.14 If significant archaeological remains were identified, reference was to be made to Research and Archaeology Revisited: a Revised Framework for the East of England (Medleycott 2011), so that the remains could, if possible, be placed within their local and regional context. All works were to be conducted in accordance with Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England (Gurney 2003).

Methodology

1.15 The footprint of the new house and garage were stripped, under archaeological supervision, using plant provided by the client’s groundworks contractor (Fig. 2). The overburden was removed to the top of the geological substrate in the SMS areas and to formation level in the watching brief area. The spoil was stored in temporary bunds or removed from site in wagons.
1.16 Following machining, the stripped surfaces were cleaned, planned and recorded in accordance with CA’s *Technical Manual 1: Fieldwork Recording Manual* (CA 2013). There were no archaeological features predating the modern period, although a number of features which appeared to be of minimal archaeological potential were cleaned, recorded and excavated in order to fully characterize land use on the site.

1.17 Each context was recorded on a *pro forma* context sheet by written and measured description. Principal deposits were recorded electronically using Leica 1200 series GPS (as appropriate) with sections being drawn at 1:10 scale. Where detailed feature planning was undertaken using GPS, this was carried out in accordance with *Technical Manual 4: Survey Manual* (CA 2009). Digital photographs were taken as appropriate. There were no finds and no deposits were encountered that were suitable for environmental sampling.

1.18 The archive from the evaluation is currently held by CA at their offices in Newport Pagnell. Subject to the agreement of the legal landowner the site archive will be deposited with Dacorum Heritage Trust. A summary of information from this project, as set out within Appendix B, will be entered onto the OASIS online database of archaeological projects in Britain.

2. RESULTS

*Archaeological strip, map & sample (SMS)*

**Area 1**

2.1 An area was opened to the south-west of the standing building, immediately adjacent to the south-eastern wall of the existing garage. This area measured 4.4m in length and 1.7m in width, with the geological substrate, 102, a compact yellowish-white chalk, being observed at a depth of 0.46m. Overlying the chalk was a layer of made-ground, 101, comprising mid orangey-grey silty clay, that measured 0.24m thick at the south-eastern edge of the area and petered out to the north-west. Above this was a thin layer of dark greyish-brown clayey silt topsoil, 100, with a thickness of 0.22m. No features of archaeological interest were observed within Area 1.
Area 2

2.2 Area 2, which measured 5.2m long by 2m wide, was opened immediately adjacent to the south-eastern gable end of the existing house. Excavation was taken to a maximum depth of 0.7m, revealing thick deposits of made-ground; the original land surface and the geological substrate were not exposed, although these were observed during the subsequent watching brief (see below). The made-ground comprised mid orangey-grey silty clay, 202, over 0.11m thick, overlain by a thin band of light yellowish-white chalk, 201, with a thickness of 0.22m. The made-ground was sealed by dark greyish-brown clayey silt topsoil, 200, with a maximum thickness of 0.34m.

Area 3

2.3 Area 3, the largest of the three SMS areas, was located to the north-west of the standing building, north of the garage and west of the existing driveway. As in Areas 1 and 2, a thin layer of dark greyish-brown clayey silt topsoil, 300, with a maximum thickness of 0.4m, overlay the compact yellowish-white chalk substrate, 303. There was no made-ground in this area, but the topsoil appears to have been redeposited, probably during landscaping following the construction of the original house.

2.4 Various features with some archaeological potential were identified within the area, with a large grouping of roughly oval-shaped features (304, 306 and 308) seen at the eastern corner of Area 3. Upon investigation these were found to contain modern pottery and brick/tile and, accompanied by the modern bioturbation observed during the machine stripping of the area, these were interpreted as having been formed by shrub and tree root disturbance. All of these features cut into the geological substrate and their fills were sealed by the topsoil.

2.5 A further, irregular-shaped feature, located against the south-western baulk of the area 302) produced similar results.
Watching Brief

Area 4

2.6 After the demolition of the existing building the ground was reduced by machine to create a basement for the new house. This revealed a terrace of made-ground, on which the original house had been built, overlying the original land surface. The made-ground, 400, comprised compacted chalk gravel and soil and was up to 1.8m thick at the south-east end of the terrace, where there was a pronounced drop in ground level down to the original land surface. At the north-west end it thinned out and merged into the original slope, close to the south edge of Area 3.

2.7 The original land surface comprised solid chalk, 403, overlain by thin subsoil, 402, comprising mid brown chalky silty clay, approximately 0.11m thick. This was overlain by the original topsoil horizon, 401, which was c. 0.3m thick. No features or deposits of archaeological interest were observed in this area and no artefactual material pre-dating the 20th century was noted in the excavated spoil.

3. DISCUSSION

Strip, map & sample (SMS) excavation

3.1 No significant archaeological features were revealed in the SMS excavation areas and no evidence was encountered to suggest Roman activity within the site. It would seem that the focus of Roman pottery production and settlement, evidence for which has been found in the vicinity of Castle Hill Avenue and High Street, lies further to the south.

3.2 However, the investigation of the site provided an insight into the methods of construction of the original house foundations, with a raft of made-ground being used to create a level terrace for the construction of the original house, which was built on a relatively steep slope.

3.3 The absence of archaeological features within this area suggests that past land-use has been predominately agricultural in nature. The shallow, irregular features investigated in Area 3 are likely to have been formed by the roots of trees and shrubs planted in the garden of the former house.
**Archaeological watching brief**

3.4 The watching brief confirmed the results of the preceding SMS excavation and provided further information on the thickness of the made-ground forming the terrace for the original house. It also provided an opportunity to monitor the stripping of the original land surface underneath the terrace, when the ground was reduced to create the basement area for the new house. No archaeological features were encountered in this area and no finds predating the 20th century were noted in the excavated spoil.

4. **CA PROJECT TEAM**

The SMS excavation was undertaken by James Coyne and the subsequent watching brief by Caoimhín O’Coileain and Simon Carlyle. The report was written by James Coyne, with illustrations prepared by Jonathan Bennett. The archive has been compiled by James Coyne and prepared for deposition by Emily Evans. The project was managed for CA by Simon Carlyle.

5. **REFERENCES**

CA (Cotswold Archaeology) 2014 23 Castle Hill, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire: Written Scheme of Investigation for a Strip, Map & Sample Excavation and Watching Brief
### APPENDIX A: CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

**Strip, map & sample excavation**

#### Area 1

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<th>Type</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<th>W (m)</th>
<th>D/T (m)</th>
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<td>100</td>
<td>Layer</td>
<td>Topsoil</td>
<td>Dark greyish brown friable clayey silt, with &gt;1% charcoal flecks and 5% small flint stones.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.22</td>
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<tr>
<td>101</td>
<td>Layer</td>
<td>Made-ground</td>
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<td>&gt;0.24</td>
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<td>201</td>
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<td>&gt;0.24</td>
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<td>&gt;5.2</td>
<td>&gt;2.0</td>
<td>0.11</td>
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<td>Mid orangey brown firm silty clay with 1% charcoal flecks and 20% chalk fragments.</td>
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<td>302</td>
<td>Cut</td>
<td>Bioturbation</td>
<td>Irregular shaped cut of bioturbation, with steep sides, irregular base and an irregular break of slope.</td>
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<td>0.18</td>
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<td>Fill</td>
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### Watching brief

#### Area 4

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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>Modern</td>
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<tr>
<td>401</td>
<td>Layer</td>
<td>Buried topsoil</td>
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<td>402</td>
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<td>Subsoil</td>
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<td>Light yellowish white compact chalk.</td>
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### APPENDIX B: OASIS REPORT FORM

#### PROJECT DETAILS

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<td>Other than the foundations of the demolished 20th-century house and features associated with planting in the former garden, no features or deposits of archaeological interest were observed during groundworks and there was no artefactual material pre-dating the modern period in the excavated spoil.</td>
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<td>15-19 May 2014, 4 and 10 June 2014</td>
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<td><strong>Project type</strong></td>
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#### PROJECT LOCATION

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#### PROJECT CREATORS

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<tr>
<th><strong>Name of organisation</strong></th>
<th>Cotswold Archaeology</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Project Brief originator</strong></td>
<td>Herts CC</td>
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<td><strong>Project Design (WSI) originator</strong></td>
<td>Cotswold Archaeology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Project Manager</strong></td>
<td>Simon Carlyle</td>
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<td><strong>Project Supervisor</strong></td>
<td>James Coyne</td>
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#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

CA (Cotswold Archaeology) 2014 23 Castle Hill, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire: Archaeological Strip, Map & Sample Excavation and Watching Brief. CA typescript report 14301
23 Castle Hill, Berkhamsted
Hertfordshire

Project Title: Site location plan

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Project No. 660167
Drawn by JB
Approved by LM
Scale 1:25,000
Plan, showing SMS and watching brief areas

- **Site**
- **SMS area**
- **Watching brief area**
- **Modern vegetation feature**
- **Tree throw**
3 General view of Area 3, looking north-west

4 Excavation for basement of new house (Area 4), looking south-east
5  Soil profile, Area 4, looking south-east
6  Soil profile, areas 2 and 4, showing made-ground, looking north-east