



**The results of an archaeological evaluation in
connection with proposals for the construction
of affordable housing on land off Bowstridge
Lane, Chalfont St Giles, Buckinghamshire
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Front cover: This is an aerial photograph (facing north-east) of the proposed development site in 1931

Figure 1. Site location plan. Scale 1:2000.

Figure 2. Trench location plan. Scale 1:1250.

Summary

SWAT Archaeology carried out a pre-planning archaeological evaluation on land off Bowstridge Lane, Chalfont St Giles between 27th September, 28th September, and 1st October 2007.

The work was undertaken at the request of RHT Developments as affordable housing were planned for the site. The proposed development area (PDA), which has an area of approximately 1.21 hectares (12,100 sq metres), lies on gently sloping land running down to the Misbourne Stream (between 85.10m and 71.20m OD) centred on National Grid Reference NGR: SU 9910 9335, just south-east of Chalfont St Giles.

Eight evaluation trenches were machine excavated, encapsulating 560 square metres, representing a 4.62% sample of the 1.21ha of the PDA. Each trench measured about 35 by 2m and were cut to the depth of significant archaeological remains or, in their absence, to the surface of the Clay with Flint or Upper Chalk.

No archaeological features were encountered.

1. Introduction

Project background

1.1 In July 2007 the Swale and Thames Archaeological Survey Company were commissioned by RHT Developments to carry out an archaeological investigation prior to the development of land off Bowstridge Lane, Chalfont St Giles, Buckinghamshire. The site (see **Fig. 1**), which has an area of approximately 1.21 hectares (12,100 sq metres), lies on relatively sloping ground (between 85.10m and 71.20m OD) centred on National Grid Reference SU 9910 9335, just south of Chalfont St Giles.

1.2 The investigation took the form of the archaeologically monitored and supervised mechanical excavation of eight evaluation trenches, each measuring about 35m by 2m and cut to the depth of significant archaeological remains or, in their absence, to the surface of the Clay with Flint or Chalk. The work took place in compliance with an archaeological specification (the SAE) "*Brief for an Archaeological Evaluation at Bowstridge Lane, Chalfont St Giles*", issued by the Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service.

1.3 The fieldwork, which began on the 27th September 2007 and was completed on the 1st October 2007, was designed in part to identify the presence or otherwise of archaeological remains and deposits within the the specified area of land. The evaluation was also conducted to ascertain the extent, depth below ground surface, depth of deposit, character, significance and condition of any archaeological remains found on site and the impact of the proposed development on them.

1.4 The results of the evaluation indicate that no archaeological remains occur at levels within the subsoil or Upper Chalk.

2. Summary of Results

2.1 The evaluation trenches were devoid of archaeological features.

2.2 In most of the site a layer of gravelly humic soil, clearly a modern agricultural soil, overlay the plough-truncated surface of Pebbly Clay with Flint or Upper Chalk to a depth of between 0.24m to 0.41m.

2.3 Trial trenching commenced on the 27th September and finished on 1st October 2007, with the excavation of eight trenches each measuring 2m in width and 35m in length. Trench locations were agreed prior to the excavation between BCAS and SWAT. Each trench was initially scanned for surface finds prior to excavation. Excavation was carried out using a 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, removing the overburden to the top of the first recognisable archaeological horizon, under the constant supervision of an experienced archaeologist. Trenches were subsequently hand-cleaned to reveal potential features in plan and cross-sections would be carefully selected and excavated to enable sufficient information about form, development date and stratigraphic relationships to be recorded without prejudice to more extensive investigations, should these prove to be necessary. All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with the specification.

2.4 A single context recording system was used to record the geological deposits. A full list is presented in Appendix 1. Layers and fills are recorded (100). Context numbers were assigned to all deposits for recording purposes; these are used in the report (in bold). Each number has been attributed to a specific trench with the primary number(s) relating to specific trenches (i.e. Trench 1, 100+, Trench 2, 200+ etc.)

2.5 **Monitoring**

Curatorial monitoring by BCAS was carried out during the course of the evaluation.

2.6 **Results.**

A common stratigraphic sequence was recognised across the site comprising topsoil overburden (101), the natural geology comprised Upper Chalk with many flints and outcrops of Pebbly Clay and Sand (103) (203). The topsoil/overburden consisted of friable dark brown silt sand clay with frequent to moderate inclusions of sub-rounded – angular flints. A clear line of horizon gave way to natural Upper Chalk or Pebbly Clay and Sand where mechanical excavation ceased and careful examination and investigation for truncated features was carried out. The depth of the overlying layer varied, with the depth of the natural geology being located c.0.24-0.41m below the existing ground level.

3. Archaeological and Historical Development

The brief issued by Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service states:

“3a. This brief sets out the requirements for trial trenching which will complete the field evaluation to be conducted at this site. A field evaluation is considered necessary because a desk based assessment produced by SWAT Archaeology (2007) has established that the site is located within an area of "high archaeological potential". The site lies within the Misbourne Valley which has proved to be a focus for prehistoric and Roman settlement. For example evidence for Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age activity have been identified close to the river Gerrards Cross (CAS00834, CAS00836). The river valley running through Chalfont St Giles Parish has not been subject to detailed investigation and the potential for significant deposits to survive in this area should be acknowledged (Hunn 2001, 25).

3b. The draft regional research assessment for Buckinghamshire Bronze Age/Iron Age notes in relation to the understanding of settlement patterns that settlements in the Chilterns are under-represented compared to other parts of the county and therefore potential sites are of additional interest (Kidd, 2007). In the Roman period it appears that the river valleys of the Chilterns become a focus for planned settlement, Branigan suggests that a string of villas were laid out in the 2nd Century (Branigan, 1967). The site lies close to the projected route of a Roman Road (CAS4361).

3c. The site lies beyond to the known historic core of Chalfont St Giles and therefore potential for medieval and post medieval deposits are considered to be low based on existing evidence”.

3.1 The Archaeological record, both in and around Chalfont St Giles is not extensive, but does include occupation evidence dating from the Prehistoric through to the industrial post-medieval period. Situated on the banks of the Misbourne Stream, the valley has likely been a focus for settlement activity since the prehistoric period. It is exactly this geographic and topographic location that will have formed the focus of trade, travel and communication for nearly 2000 years and therefore it comes as a surprise that the area has not been subject to detailed archaeological investigation.

3.2 The proposed development site is located approximately 200m to the south-east of the centre of Chalfont St Giles, beyond the periphery of the historical core of the village. This section of the assessment will focus on the archaeological and historical development of the environs of the village, placing it within its local and regional context. Each period classification will provide a brief introduction to the wider landscape, followed by a full record of archaeological sites, monuments and records within the site's immediate vicinity. Locations of monuments and spot finds are presented in Appendix 1.

3.3 Scheduled Monuments, Listed Buildings Historic Parks & Gardens and Conservation Areas
Some scheduled monuments and listed buildings are recorded within a 1km radius of the proposed development site. For instance, the Historic Cottage and Garden at Miltons Cottage is situated just under 300m to the north-west of the site. It is also the site of a museum dedicated to Milton, and is the only remaining house in which Milton lived.

3.4 Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age

The prehistoric period within the Misbourne valley will have followed traditional patterns observed elsewhere within the county until the Iron Age where evidence becomes a little more complex. The Mesolithic period is represented by the presence of lithic scatters, (BM.0433802000) with tools such as blades and flakes providing an insight into the earliest phase of human activity within the Misbourne valley area.

3.5 By the Neolithic period, the adoption of a sedentary lifestyle based on agriculture and animal husbandry is illustrated by both 'ceremonial' and 'domestic' settlement patterns.

Neolithic flints retrieved from the Parish of Chalfont St Giles include three scrapers, four flakes with secondary working, one chipped flint axe and a biconical core (Card No. 4338).

3.6 The Bronze Age is represented by larger migrations from the continent and more complex social developments on a domestic, industrial and ceremonial level. Occupation of Chalfont St Giles is believed to have continued throughout the Bronze Age with two 'Roman hearths' re-interpreted by Simon Smithson in 1985 as an Bronze Age area of food preparation, and of the making of hide sacks and trough linings ((BCM Ref. CAS 1597).

Some 220 worked or struck flints were retrieved by field-walking in the vicinity of the burnt mounds. A Bronze Age barbed and tanged flint arrowhead was found in 1965 in the back garden of Hay House (BM.0159200000).

3.7 Iron Age

It is by the Iron Age that settlement patterns become more visible, both within the archaeological record and the physical landscape.

The Iron Age presence is also reflected within the archaeological record with the finding of an early British gold stater of Addedomaros (Type 5). The coin can be dated to about 15BC. (Card No. 1591 and BM.0159100000).

3.8 Romano-British

The term Romano-British describes the Romanised culture of Britain under the rule of the Roman Empire, following the Claudian 'invasion' in AD43. For nearly 400 years Britain formed part of the Roman Empire, the civilisation of Roman Britain being the synthesis of the Roman and native cultures, although it is evident that trade links and communication between Rome and Britain existed prior to the 'Roman' period. The Roman political system 'clientela' served as the model between Rome and her allies and negotiations that took place meant that alliances were forged, trade started to expand and the spread of cultural ideals occurred. These ideals are no more evident than within the infrastructure that started to develop all over Britain and Europe during the Roman period.

The predominant feature of infrastructure within Buckinghamshire is arguably the extensive network of Roman roads. The Roman administration needed an established network of roads to connect administrative centres, towns and military posts too speed up the flow of trade, goods, communications and troops. Approximately 100m to the north of the proposed development area is the Roman road known as 'Viatores' route 163 that links Verulamium (St Albans) to Calleva Atrebatum (Silchester) Locations for the route are recorded on the Buckinghamshire Monument List Report (Ref. 0431000000).

Further evidence of Roman activity is recorded by the finding of four pieces of tegula, two small pieces of possible tesserae, and fragments of Romano-British pottery at SU 9861 9487 to 9848 9462. (Ref. Card No. 1597).

3.9 Anglo-Saxon

The place name of Chalfont St Giles can be traced to the 7th century (Celfunte) and the 13th century (Chaufunt St Giles) The etymology for the name would appear to derive from funta a 'spring', a loan word from Latin fons, fontis. It is suggested by Margaret Gelling that the Latin word was borrowed by early Anglo-Saxon settlers or Germanic mercenaries in the last century of Roman Britain, to describe a spring which was characterised by Roman building work (Gelling 1984).

3.10 Medieval

Despite a rather extensive Medieval focus within Chalfont St Giles itself, the assessment area is relatively limited as far as this period concerned. The early village appears to have grown up on the existing Roman road adjacent to the River Misbourne. By the middle of the 11th century the village

was recorded in 1086 as "Chalfont (St Giles) Mainou (the Breton) holds 4 hides and 3 virgates. Land for 15 ploughs; in lordship 1 hide; 3 ploughs there. 13 villagers and 8 smallholders have 12 ploughs, 4 slaves,; 3 mills; one of them pays 5 ora and the other two pay nothing; meadow for 1 plough; woodland, 600 pigs; in this woodland, a hawk's eyrie. Total value £6 10s" (Domesday Book).

3.11 Post-Medieval

Continued expansion of Chalfont St Giles by the middle of the sixteenth century further reinforced the villages position as trading centre. As a result, the surrounding landscape which predominantly comprised a series of manorial estates was given over to agriculture and farming. Cartographic regression of the assessment area suggests that the assessment site were used as meadow until the change of use to allotment gardens.

3.12 Modern

Modern development on the site is limited to the establishment of allotment gardens.

3.13 Undated

Numerous undated earthworks are recorded approximately 600m to the south-east of the proposed development area. The earthworks are recorded on early Ordnance Survey maps.

4. Objectives and Methodology

Objectives

The principle objectives were set out in the SAE, as follows:

Trial trenching should aim to gather sufficient information to generate a reliable predictive model of the extent, character, date, state of preservation and depth of burial of important archaeological remains within the area of study, particularly bearing in mind the potential for prehistoric and Roman activity.

3. 1. 6

Methodology

All site work was undertaken in accordance with the methodology set out in the SAE. On site health and safety followed a written Method Statement and Risk Assessment, following the *SWAT Archaeology's Company Policy and Procedural Manual for Health, Safety and Welfare* (2006). SWAT Archaeology is a company directed by a registered Member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists and conforms to their by-laws, standards and policy statements.

4.1 Eight evaluation trenches were excavated by a tracked 360 degree JCB with a toothless ditching bucket, and monitored by staff from SWAT Archaeology.

The location of the evaluation trenches were recorded by SWAT Archaeology and plotted on to the OS grid superimposed onto the site plan (**Fig.1**).

4.2 In the absence of archaeological features from all of the evaluation trenches, eight trench recording sheets were utilised to record the natural geology.

A trench location plan was established on site by Survey Grade GPS.

4.3 Survey data was located to a digital Ordnance Survey tile (reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey). OD levels were obtained by Survey Grade GPS. All trenches were located using Survey Grade GPS. All drawn site plans and sections were digitised using AutoCAD.

4.4 The plough soil exposed within the eight test trenches varied in thickness from 0.24m to 0.46m and was notably devoid of any archaeological materials excepting occasional roof-tile fragments and fragments of nineteenth and twentieth-century pottery.

4.5 Intact Upper Chalk was exposed in Test Trenches 1 – 5 at depths of between of 0.28 – 0.34m across most of the site. The surface of the Upper Chalk, which was commonly scarred by sub-soiling, contained within it deposits of rounded chalk granules and/or well-rounded flint pebbles in a sandy matrix.

4.6 Overall, the methodology of investigation can be considered to have been effective, The archaeological evaluation has been successful in fulfilling the primary aims and objectives of the Brief. No buried archaeological remains were present within the excavated trenches suggesting that the proposed development presents little or no impact upon the local archaeological resource. This evaluation has therefore assessed the archaeological potential of land intended for development. The results from this work will be used to aid and inform the Archaeological Officer (BCAS) of any further archaeological mitigations measures that may be necessary in connection with the development proposals.

4.7 The archaeological works were monitored by Paul Wilkinson PhD, FRSA, MIFA, who is a registered Member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists, and James Madden, both staff of the Swale and Thames Archaeological Survey Company (SWAT Archaeology).

4.8 Following completion of fieldwork a site archive was prepared in accordance with Appendix 3 of *Management of Archaeological Projects* (English Heritage, 1991, MAP2). The site archive is presently held in the offices of SWAT Archaeology.

5. The Evaluation

Overview

All trenches were located within the area of the PDA.

5.1 Evaluation Trench 1, situated at the northern end of the site and running east to west, measured 35m by 2m. The level at the top of the west end of the evaluation trench was 83.20m O.D. At the east end 80.40m O.D. Topsoil was 0.36m deep at the east end and 0.39m deep at the west end and sealed the natural strata of Upper Chalk with outcrops of Pebbly Clay and Sand. No archaeological features were encountered.

5.2 Evaluation Trench 2, situated at the west end of the site and running east to west, measured 30m by 2m. The level at the top of the east end of the evaluation trench was 79.40m O.D. At the west end 84.20m O.D. Topsoil was 0.32m deep at the east end and 0.34m deep at the west end and sealed the natural strata of Upper Chalk with outcrops of Pebbly Clay and Sand. No archaeological features were encountered.

5.3 Evaluation Trench 3, situated at the south west end of the site and running north to south, measured 35m by 2m. The level at the top of the north end of the evaluation trench was 85.01m O.D. At the south end 85.39m O.D. Topsoil was 0.35m deep at the east end and 0.36m deep at the west end and sealed the natural strata of Upper Chalk with outcrops of Pebbly Clay and Sand. No archaeological features were encountered.

5.4 Evaluation Trench 4, situated at the southern end of the site and running north to south, measured 35m by 2m. The level at the top of the north end of the evaluation trench was 79.20m O.D. At the south end 80.50m O.D. Topsoil was 0.35m deep at the north end and 0.34m deep at the south end and sealed the natural strata of Upper Chalk with outcrops of Pebbly Clay and Sand. No archaeological features were encountered.

5.5 Evaluation Trench 5, situated at the centre of the site and running south-east to north-west, measured 35m by 2m. The level at the top of the south-east end of the evaluation trench was 76.18m O.D. At the north-west end 78.20m O.D. Topsoil was 0.36m deep at the south-east end and 0.34m deep at the north-west end and sealed the natural strata of Upper Chalk with outcrops of Upper Chalk with outcrops of Pebbly Clay and Sand. No archaeological features were encountered.

5.6 Evaluation Trench 6, situated at the south-east end of the site and running west to east, measured 35m by 2m. The level at the top of the west end of the evaluation trench was 74.39m O.D. At the east end 72.19m O.D. Topsoil was 0.38m deep at the north end and 0.37m deep at the south end and sealed the natural strata of Upper Chalk with outcrops of Pebbly Clay and Sand. No archaeological features were encountered.

5.7 Evaluation Trench 7, situated at the north-east end of the site and running north to south, measured 35m by 2m. The level at the top of the north end of the evaluation trench was 70.01m O.D.

At the south end 71.07m O.D. Topsoil was 0.46m deep at the north end and 0.48m deep at the south end and sealed the natural strata of Upper Chalk with outcrops of Pebbly Clay and Sand. No archaeological features were encountered.

5.8 Evaluation Trench 8, situated at the centre of the site and running east to west, measured 30m by 2m. The level at the top of the east end of the evaluation trench was 73.63m O.D. At the west end 79.54m O.D. Topsoil was 0.33m deep at the east end and 0.35m deep at the west end and sealed the natural strata of Upper Chalk with outcrops of Pebbly Clay and Sand. No archaeological features were encountered.

6. Discussion

6.1 The archaeological evaluation carried out at the site of the proposed housing off Bowstridge Lane, Chalfont St Giles shows the site has been truncated by agricultural and market gardening activity. As a result any archaeological features that may have been present have since been destroyed.

8. Finds

8.1 No finds were made.

8.2 Environmental data

The site at Bowstridge Lane consists of Upper Chalk, a soft white chalk with many flints and outcrops of Pebbly Clay and Sand. The soils that have developed over this have a high clay content. Processing bulk samples consisting of such soils on a large scale is difficult and time-consuming. Recovery of small organic remains is often inefficient due to the difficulty of breaking up the sediment.

9. Conclusions

9.1 Extent, date and character of the archaeological deposits

The archaeological evaluation has been successful in fulfilling the primary aims and objectives of the Brief. No buried archaeological remains were present within the excavated trenches suggesting that the proposed development presents little or no impact upon the local archaeological resource.

9.2 This evaluation has therefore assessed the archaeological potential of land intended for development. The results from this work will be used to aid and inform the Archaeological Officer (BCAS) of any further archaeological mitigations measures that may be necessary in connection with the development proposals.

9.3 The confidence rating of this evaluation is high.

9.4 SWAT would like to thank RHT Developments for commissioning the project. Thanks are also extended to David Radford, Archaeological Officer (Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service) for his advice and assistance. Paul Wilkinson and James Madden carried out archaeological fieldwork, illustrations were produced by James Madden. This report was written by Paul Wilkinson PhD. FRSA. MIFA.

Paul Wilkinson
October 2007

10. References

Wilkinson, P. (SWAT Archaeology) Archaeological Desk-based Assessment of Land off Bowstridge Lane, Chalfont St Giles, Buckinghamshire. 2007.

Gelling, M. Signposts to the Past. 1984.