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**Elstree Western Bypass, Hertfordshire
STAGE 2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT
(GEOTECHNICAL)**

by

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Elstree Western Bypass, Hertfordshire

STAGE 2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT (GEOTECHNICAL)

Introduction

This report outlines the results of the archaeological monitoring of 15 trial pits excavated to test the underlying geology along the proposed route option of the Elstree Western Bypass, Hertfordshire. It has been prepared by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) on behalf of the Hertfordshire County Council Transportation Department.

The Study Area

The trial pits were excavated along the line of a provisional route option for the proposed bypass (see attached figure).

Methodology

An archaeologist was present to record the archaeological content of the trial pits which were opened up by a mechanical excavator. Recording was by means of pre-printed pro-forma recording sheets for contexts and features, supplemented by photographs and sketches, which are all held in the site archive.

Results

The original numbering system for the trial pits used by HCC was altered by BUFAU to aid recording purposes. The original trial pit number is given in brackets below, and can be seen on the attached figure. On this figure extra pits 5a and 14a are not shown.

Trial Pit 1 (5)

Dimensions: 2.5m (N-S) x 0.8m (E-W), Depth 3.0m.

Trial Pit 1 was located to the west of a modern housing development in an area of uneven ground which was heavily overgrown.

The topsoil (1000) in Trial Pit 1 consisted of a medium brown silty clay, 0.10m in depth. This was underlain by a yellowy brown clay layer (1001) which contained a small percentage of silt, as well as occasional flecks of charcoal and tiny brick fragments. The natural light brown clay subsoil (1002) was detected at a depth of 0.45m. The nature of this deposit appeared to be continuous to a depth of 3.0m, where excavation ceased.

Interpretation

No archaeological features were identified in Trial Pit 1. The yellowy brown clay layer (1001) may be representative of agricultural processes taking place in the area. However, it is not possible to date this activity due to the absence of artefacts.

Trial Pit 2 (7)

Dimensions: 2.5m (N-S) x 0.8m (E-W), Depth 3.0m.

Trial Pit 2 was located in an area of uneven ground which was heavily overgrown.

The topsoil (2000) in Trial Pit 2 consisted of a medium brown silty clay, 0.10m in depth. This was underlain by a yellowy brown clay layer (2001), which varied in depth from 0.30-0.35m and contained a small percentage of silt, as well as occasional flecks of charcoal and tiny brick fragments. The natural light brown clay subsoil (2002) was encountered at a depth of 0.40-0.45m. The nature of this deposit appeared to be continuous to a depth of 3.0m, where excavation ceased.

The only artefact recovered from Trial Pit 2 was the rim fragment of a wheel thrown bowl. This has a cream fabric and a vivid green interior glaze suggestive of the type of pottery called Surrey Whiteware which was manufactured in the late-medieval period. This sherd could not be assigned to a particular archaeological context.

Interpretation

No archaeological features were identified in Trial Pit 2. The varying depth of the yellowy brown clay layer (2001) may be suggestive of disturbance of the natural subsoil by ploughing. The rim fragment recovered from Trial Pit 2 might indicate that there has been agricultural activity in the area during the late-medieval period. The stratigraphic sequence in Trial Pit 2 was very similar to the one encountered in Trial Pit 1.

Trial Pit 3 (3)

Dimensions: 2.5m (E-W) x 0.8m (N-S), Depth 2.0m.

Trial Pit 3 was situated on level ground, at the bottom of a slope, in the NW corner of a sports field.

The topsoil (3000) in Trial Pit 3 consisted of a medium brown silty clay, with occasional flecks of charcoal. This was underlain by the natural light brown clay subsoil (3001), which was encountered at a depth of 0.20m. The nature of this deposit appeared to be continuous to a depth of 2.0m, where excavation ceased. Cutting the natural subsoil in Trial Pit 3 was a pipe trench (F300), orientated N-S and filled with a light brown clay (3002). F300 had a bowl-shaped profile and was approximately 1.50m in width, and 0.60m deep.

One sherd of modern "willow pattern" pottery was recovered from the topsoil in Trial Pit 3.

Interpretation

No archaeological features were identified in Trial Pit 3.

Trial Pit 4 (2)

Dimensions: 2.5m (E-W) x 0.8m (N-S), Depth 1.5m.

Trial Pit 4 was situated on level ground, towards the north east corner of the sports field.

The topsoil (4000) in Trial Pit 4, which had a depth of 0.20m, consisted of a medium brown silty clay, with occasional flecks of charcoal and tiny brick fragments. This was underlain by a light brown clay layer (4001), the depth of which was 0.40m. This contained mortar inclusions as well as occasional tiny brick fragments.

The natural light brown clay subsoil (4002) was encountered at a depth of 0.60m. The nature of this deposit appeared to be continuous to a depth of 1.50m, where excavation ceased. No finds were recovered from Trial Pit 4.

Interpretation

No archaeological features were identified in Trial Pit 4. The light brown clay layer (4001), which contained mortar and brick inclusions, is probably "made-ground" used as a levelling deposit for the sports field. This would tend to suggest that any archaeological features or deposits which may have been present have been removed during the levelling process.

Trial Pit 5 (14)

Dimensions: 2.25m (N-S) x 0.80m (E-W), Depth 1.50m.

Trial Pit 5 was located in a slightly overgrown field where the ground was extensively cracked due to the recent dry weather conditions. The trial pit was situated immediately to the south of a boundary with a well established hedgeline and a slight bank.

The topsoil (5000) in Trial Pit 5 consisted of a light brown silty clay, with a small percentage of sand as well as occasional charcoal flecks. This layer continued to a depth of 0.30m and was underlain by an orangey brown clay subsoil (5001). There were pockets of gravel at the interface between these two deposits. A natural medium brown clay (5002) was encountered at a depth of 0.60m. The nature of this deposit appeared to be continuous to a depth of 1.50m, where excavation ceased. No finds were recovered from Trial Pit 5.

Interpretation

No archaeological features were identified in Trial Pit 5.

Trial Pit 6 (16)

Dimensions: 2.0m (E-W) x 0.80m (N-S), Depth 2.0m.

Trial Pit 6 was located on a spur of level higher ground.

The topsoil (6000) in Trial Pit 6 consisted of a medium brown silty sand, with a depth of 0.20m, which contained occasional charcoal flecks and tiny brick fragments. This was underlain by an orangey brown clay subsoil (6001), with grey silt mottling. A natural medium brown clay (6002) was encountered at a depth of 0.60m. This appeared to be continuous to a depth of 2.0m, where excavation ceased. No finds were recovered from Trial Pit 6.

Interpretation

No archaeological features were identified in Trial Pit 6.

Trial Pit 7 (17)

Dimensions: 2.20m (N-S) x 0.80m (E-W), Depth 2.0m.

Trial Pit 7 was located on level ground, immediately to the west of a boundary with a well established hedgeline. On the opposite side of the hedge the Aldenham Road runs in a south east to north westerly direction, following the same course as the Roman road (*Site No.2* Moscrop and Tyler 1995) which lies directly to the east.

The topsoil (7000) in Trial Pit 7 consisted of a medium brown silty clay, 0.25m in depth. This was underlain by a light brown clay layer (7001), with a depth of 0.15m, which contained occasional flecks of charcoal and tiny brick fragments. The orangey brown clay subsoil (7002), with grey silt mottling, was encountered at a depth of 0.40m. A natural medium brown clay (7003) was contacted at a depth of 0.75m and appeared to be continuous to a depth of 2.0m where excavation ceased.

Several finds were recovered from the topsoil in Trial Pit 7. There is evidence for prehistoric activity in the area in the form of a side and end scraper, worked from high quality dark grey flint, as well as two conical flint flakes. Most of the other finds date from the post-medieval period. Four abraded pot fragments, with traces of a brown glaze, probably come from vessels dating c.1700-1800. Later activity in this area is represented by finds of relatively modern glass and the bowl of a clay pipe decorated with a leaf motif. Eleven fragments of brick and tile, none of which has chronologically diagnostic features, as well as four fragments of metalworking slag, were also found.

Interpretation

No archaeological features were identified in Trial Pit 7. The presence of three worked flints in the topsoil is suggestive of prehistoric activity in the area.

Trial Pit 8 (25)

Dimensions: 2.50m (NS) x 0.80m (EW), Depth 1.50m.

Trial Pit 8 was located at the bottom of a slope on level ground in the north eastern corner of a large enclosure. A tree lined boundary lies immediately to the north, and the A5, formerly the Roman road known as Watling Street (*Site No.64* Moscrop and Tyler 1995), is situated to the east. Looking southwards, up the incline towards Elstree Village, the ridges, mounds and hollows (*Site No.5* Moscrop and Tyler 1995), which are probably associated with clay extraction processes, can be clearly seen.

The topsoil (8000) in Trial Pit 8 consisted of a sandy clay silt, with a depth of 0.20m. This was underlain by a light orangey brown silty clay layer (8001), which contained occasional flecks of charcoal and tiny brick fragments, and varied in depth from 0.10m-0.25m. An orangey brown silty clay (8002) was encountered below this. A field drain ran along the south-facing section of Trial Pit 8 at a depth of 0.60m, and a further drain ran perpendicular to it in the east-facing section at a depth of 0.50m. The natural medium brown clay subsoil (8003) lay directly underneath 8002 at a depth of 0.60m.

Several post-medieval/modern artefacts were found in the topsoil. These consisted of fragments of pottery, tile, brick and glass, as well as a clay pipe bowl fragment decorated with a "fish-scale" motif. A tile fragment has no chronologically diagnostic features, but may date from an earlier period.

Interpretation

No archaeological features were identified in Trial Pit 8. It is probable that deposits 8001 and 8002 are pipe trench backfills.

Trial Pit 9 (23)

Dimensions: 2.25m (NS) x 0.80m (EW), Depth 2.10m.

Trial Pit 9 was located to the west of Trial Pit 8 in similar surroundings. The probable clay extraction pits and dumps (Site No.5) could be seen to the south.

The topsoil (9000) in Trial Pit 9 consisted of a medium brown silty clay, 0.20m in depth. This was underlain by an orangey brown silty clay (9001) with grey silt mottling. At a depth of 0.40m the orangey brown clay subsoil (9002), which contained quite a high percentage of grey silt mottling, was encountered. The surface of 9002 appeared to be disturbed. A natural medium brown clay (9003) was revealed at a depth of 0.60m. This deposit appeared to be continuous to a depth of 2.10m, where excavation ceased.

Several fragments of tile were recovered from the topsoil in Trial Pit 9, none of which has chronologically diagnostic features. A few fragments of modern pottery, brick and glass were also found.

Interpretation

No archaeological features were identified in Trial Pit 9. The disturbance of 9002 was probably caused by ploughing.

Trial Pit 10 (21)

Dimensions: 2.40m (NS) x 0.80m (EW), depth 2.50m.

Trial Pit 10 was located in the north west corner of a large field currently under pasture.

The topsoil (1050) in Trial Pit 10 consisted of a medium brown silty clay, which varied in depth from 0.20m in the centre of the pit to 0.30m at its northern and southern ends. This was underlain by a yellowish brown silty clay (1051), 0.10-0.20m deep. This variation in depth was of the same undulating nature as 1050. An

orangey brown clay subsoil (1052), with grey silt mottling, was encountered at a depth of 0.30-0.50m. A natural medium brown clay (1053) was revealed at a depth of 0.70m. The nature of this deposit appeared to be continuous to a depth of 2.50m, where excavation ceased.

One modern pottery sherd and a single tile fragment were recovered from the topsoil in Trial Pit 10.

Interpretation

No archaeological features were identified in Trial Pit 10. The undulating nature of 1050 and 1051 may be caused by ploughing.

Trial Pit 11 (19)

Dimensions: 2.50m (NS) x 0.80m (EW), depth 1.50m.

Trial Pit 11 was located towards the northern boundary of a field with a gentle slope from the south west to the north east.

The topsoil (1100) in Trial Pit 11 consisted of a medium brown silty clay, 0.20m in depth. This was underlain by a yellowish brown silty clay (1101) with very occasional brick fragments, the depth of which varied between 0.15m and 0.20m. The orangey brown clay subsoil (1102), with grey silt mottling, was encountered at a depth of 0.35-0.40m. A natural medium brown clay (1103) was revealed at 0.70m below ground level. The nature of this deposit appeared to be continuous to a depth of 1.50m, where excavation ceased.

Two fragments of pottery with a yellow-brown glaze, possibly representative of the late-medieval to post-medieval transitional period, were recovered from 1100. A few fragments of modern pottery, brick and glass were also found.

Interpretation

No archaeological features were identified in Trial Pit 11. The presence of two possible late medieval to post-medieval sherds in the topsoil is suggestive of activity in the area during this transitional period. The deposits in this pit were very similar to those encountered in Trial Pit 10. The varying depth of 1101 is suggestive of slight disturbance of the subsoil probably caused by ploughing.

Trial Pit 12 (14a)

Dimensions: 2.10m (NWSE) x 0.80m (SWNE), depth 2.0m.

Trial Pit 12 was located towards the southern boundary of a large enclosure.

The topsoil (1200) in Trial Pit 12 consisted of a light brown silty clay, 0.30m in depth. This was underlain by an orangey brown subsoil (1201), with grey silt mottling, also 0.30m deep. At the interface between 1200 and 1201 there was a mixing of deposits. A natural medium brown clay (1202) was encountered at a depth of 0.60m. The nature of this deposit appeared to be continuous to a depth of 2.0m, where excavation ceased.

One fragment of modern pottery as well as five fragments of modern brick and tile were recovered from the topsoil in Trial Pit 12.

Interpretation

No archaeological features were identified in Trial Pit 12.

Trial Pit 13 (5a)

Dimensions 2.10 (NESW) x 0.80m (NWSE), depth 3.50m.

Trial Pit 13 was located to the west of a modern housing estate on uneven ground which was heavily overgrown. It was situated towards the bottom of an east to west slope.

The topsoil (1300) in Trial Pit 13 consisted of a medium brown silty clay, 0.15m in depth. This was underlain by an orangey brown silty clay (1301), which varied in depth from 0.15m at the north-eastern end of Trial Pit 13, to 0.05m at its south-western end. The orangey brown clay subsoil (1302), with grey silt mottling, was encountered at a depth of 0.20-0.30m. A natural medium brown clay (1303) was revealed at a depth of 0.55m. The nature of this deposit appeared to be continuous to a depth of 3.50m, where excavation ceased.

One fragment of modern white glaze pottery, as well as four fragments of brick and tile, none of which has chronologically diagnostic features, were found in the topsoil in Trial Pit 13. One sherd of probable early post-medieval pottery was recovered from 1301.

Interpretation

No archaeological features were identified in Trial Pit 13. The variation in depth of 1301 is suggestive of ploughing.

Trial Pit 14 (9)

Dimensions: 2.10m (EW) x 0.80m (NS), depth 3.50m.

Trial Pit 14 was located in a field used as pasture for horses.

The topsoil (1400) in Trial Pit 14 consisted of a medium brown silty clay, 0.25m in depth. This was underlain by a hard medium brown clay (1401), which contained very occasional tiny brick fragments. This deposit was dried out and cracked (due to recent weather conditions) down to a depth of 0.50m, where it became a softer medium brown natural clay (1402). The nature of 1402 appeared to be continuous to a depth of 3.50m, where excavation ceased.

One post-medieval sherd was recovered from the topsoil in Trial Pit 14, as well as fragments of modern pottery, brick and glass.

Interpretation

No archaeological features were identified in Trial Pit 14. It was difficult to be certain about the depth at which the natural subsoil was encountered in this trial pit.

Trial Pit 15 (10)

Dimensions: 2.0m (NS) x 0.80m (EW), depth 1.50m.

Trial Pit 15 was originally excavated adjacent to the northern boundary of a field used as pasture for horses, to the north of Trial Pit 14. This original position had to be moved, approximately 5.0m to the south, when a gravel backfill, probably associated with modern field drainage, was encountered at a depth of 0.20m.

The topsoil (1500) in the repositioned Trial Pit 15 consisted of a medium brown silty clay, 0.20m in depth. The above mentioned gravel (1501) was encountered immediately below this, and varied in depth from 0.10m in the centre of the pit to 0.40m at its northern and southern ends. 1501 was interpreted as the fill of two drainage trenches, F150 and F151. The orangey brown clay subsoil (1502), with grey silt mottling, was revealed at varying depths (0.30-0.60m), due to truncation by F150 and F151. A natural medium brown clay lay directly below this deposit at a depth of 0.65m. The nature of this deposit appeared to be continuous to a depth of 1.50m, where excavation ceased.

Two fragments of modern tile were found in the topsoil in Trial Pit 15. Further fragments of modern brick, tile and pottery were recovered from 1501.

Interpretation

No archaeological features were identified in Trial Pit 15. 1501 has probably been used for drainage in this area. The section of Trial Pit 15 suggests that these "drainage ditches" run down the natural slope from east to west, probably to encounter problems of flooding.

Conclusion

The excavation of 15 trial pits along the proposed route option has provided only limited evidence for archaeological activity within the study area prior to the early post-medieval and modern periods.

Prehistoric

Trial pitting along the proposed route option has produced some evidence for activity during the prehistoric period. The recovery of three worked flints from Trial Pit 7 may be suggestive of prehistoric activity in the area close to the former Roman road (*Site No.2* Moscrop and Tyler 1995), to the north west of Elstree village.

Roman

Trial pitting along the proposed route option has produced no evidence for activity during the Roman period.

Saxon

Trial pitting along the proposed route option has produced no evidence for activity during the Saxon period.

Medieval

Trial pitting along the proposed route option has produced only limited evidence for activity during the medieval period. A probable late-medieval rim fragment was recovered from Trial Pit 2 which was located to the south west of Elstree village.

Post Medieval/Modern

Trial pitting along the proposed route option has produced evidence for activity dating from the early post-medieval period onwards.

A transitional phase of late-medieval to post-medieval activity, to the north west of the settlement of Elstree, may be represented by two fragments of pottery recovered from Trial Pit 11. Later post-medieval activity to the west of Trial Pit 11 is suggested by four sherds (c.1700) found in Trial Pit 7. Two sherds from Trial Pits 13 and 14 are suggestive of activity of a similar date, to the west of the modern housing development which lies immediately to the south of Elstree. Most of the trial pits produced artefacts which date from the late post-medieval period onwards.

Summary

Information from the trial pitting stage has provided only a limited insight into the archaeological content along the proposed route option. However, the results of the above, combined with those of the Stage 2 desktop study (Moscrop and Tyler 1995), will enable a decision to be made concerning the nature of the work required to complete the Stage 3 archaeological assessment.

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The figure for this report was provided by Hertfordshire County Council.

References

Moscrop, D. & Tyler, D. 1995. *Elstree Western Bypass, Hertfordshire. Stage 2 Archaeological Assessment*. BUFAU Report No.348.