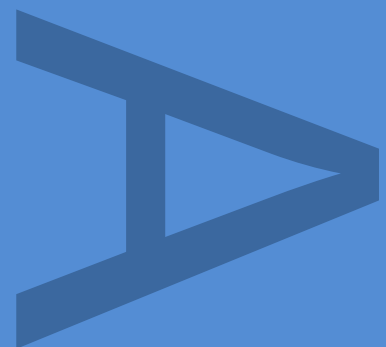


**61 Station Road, Ashwell,
Hertfordshire: An
Archaeological Evaluation**

June 2014



**PRE-CONSTRUCT ARCHAEOLOGY
R11737**

61 Station Road, Ashwell, Hertfordshire:

An Archaeological Trial Trench Evaluation

Local Planning Authority: North Hertfordshire District Council

Planning Reference: 12/02079/1

Central National Grid Reference: TL 2743 3987

Site Code: HSRA14

Report No. R11737

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June 2014


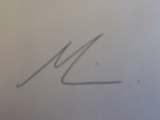
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61 STATION ROAD, ASHWELL, HERTFORDSHIRE

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

Quality Control

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Report Number	R11737

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ABSTRACT

This report describes the results of a six-trench archaeological evaluation carried out by Pre-Construct Archaeology on land at 61 Station Road, Ashwell, Hertfordshire (NGR TL 27433 39873) on 11th - 12th June 2014. The archaeological work was commissioned by CgMs Consulting on behalf of Miller Homes, in advance of proposed residential development. The aim of the work was to characterise the archaeological potential of the site.

The evaluation identified a cluster of post-medieval chalk quarry pits. These were cut through a buried plough-soil deriving from use of the site as arable farmland up until the c. 1930s. Apart from a single small modern pit and a tree hollow, no other archaeological features were present. The results of the trial-trenching are of limited significance.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 An archaeological trial trench evaluation was undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd (PCA) on land at 61 Station Road, Ashwell, Hertfordshire, SG7 5LR (centred on Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference (NGR) TL 27433 39873) on 11th-12th June 2014 (Figure 1; Plates 1-2).
- 1.2 The site is located to the east of the historic core of Ashwell village. It is bounded by Station Road to the south-west and by a touring caravan site to the east. The south side of the site borders an area of archaeological alert with known potential for prehistoric and Roman archaeology. Ashwell Street, a Roman road following the course of the Icknield Way (a long-distance trackway of possible prehistoric date), runs through Ashwell just to the south of the site.
- 1.3 The archaeological work was commissioned by CgMs Consulting on behalf of Miller Homes in response to an archaeological planning condition attached to the construction of 20 dwellings with associated garages, access, car-parking and landscaping (Planning Reference 12/02079/1).
- 1.4 The evaluation was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) prepared by Chris Clarke of CgMs Consulting (Clarke 2014) in response to advice from Andy Instone of Hertfordshire County Council Historic Environment Team.
- 1.5 The aim of the evaluation was to determine the location, date, extent, character, condition and quality of any archaeological remains on the site, to assess the significance of any such remains in a local, regional, or national context, as appropriate, and to assess the potential impact of the development proposals on the site's archaeology.
- 1.6 Six trial trenches measuring between 22 and 25m in length were excavated and recorded on 11th-12th June 2014.
- 1.7 This report describes the results of the evaluation and aims to inform the design of an appropriate archaeological mitigation strategy. The site archive

will be deposited at Ashwell Museum via the North Hertfordshire Museum Service.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

- 2.1 The geology of the site is Zig Zag Formation Chalk, with no superficial deposits recorded (British Geological Survey 2014; Website 1).
- 2.2 The site lies at an elevation of c. 54m above Ordnance Datum (OD) in the west, sloping down to c. 51m OD in the north and north-east (Figure 1).
- 2.3 The natural chalk (7) was encountered at levels ranging from 54.13m OD at the east end of Trench 1, towards the western edge of the site, and 51.30m OD at the north-east end of Trench 4, indicating that the natural chalk slopes downwards from the south and west to the north and north-east.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The following material is derived from a desk-based assessment prepared by the Heritage Collective LLP (Hulka 2012).
- 3.2 The site lies on the fringes of the village and is bounded to the west by Ashwell Conservation Area and to the south by an area of archaeological alert with known potential for prehistoric and Roman activity. The route of Roman Ashwell Street extends from south-west to north-east just to the south of the site; the Roman road may follow the line of one of the branches of the Icknield Way, a long-distance route of possible prehistoric date.
- 3.3 A survey project carried out in 2002 indicates that the higher ground around Ashwell was well-used during the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age, with cropmarks indicating numerous burial sites to the south and south-west (MHT2468, 2469, 4717 and 6113).
- 3.4 Later prehistoric occupation of the area was widespread and relatively dense, comprising late Bronze Age occupation of Arbury Banks hillfort 1.5km to the south-west of the site, and an extensive hinterland of agricultural fields across the lower slopes of the hills. Archaeological excavation less than 100m south of the site (EHT3148) uncovered a number of features containing pottery and flints of Late Iron Age and/ or Romano-British date, including a pair of parallel ditches (MHT11397) which were interpreted as roadside ditches of a track leading between enclosed fields.
- 3.5 Activity in this area during the Roman period appears to have changed little from the occupation patterns of the Bronze and Iron Age. The Icknield Way is thought to have been consolidated or at least used as a Roman Road, but there is little evidence for roadside occupation in the vicinity of the proposed development site. Unstratified coins dating from between the late 1st century and early 4th century AD have been recorded from a site to the south of Ashwell High Street (MHT2973) and a site in a lane to the east of Ashwell Springs in 1977.
- 3.6 Saxon occupation of the north Chilterns appears to have taken place after

the Roman departure in the 5th century. The remains of two sunken featured buildings were uncovered close to the springs at Ruddery End along with land divisions in the form of earthworks known as 'Shire Balk'. The present core of Ashwell village appears to have been deliberately laid out in the late 9th century. By AD 1065 Edward the Confessor had given the manor and rectory of Ashwell to the Abbey of St. Peter in Westminster.

- 3.7 The medieval core of Ashwell lies to the west of the site and outside of this core the land is likely to have been in agricultural use, as indicated by the presence of truncated ridge and furrow c. 150m to the east of the site.
- 3.8 Dury and Andrews' county map of 1766 shows the site as being beyond the developed part of the village and it continued to be shown as farmland on Ordnance Survey maps until the early 20th century, when expansion of the village occurred and buildings were first erected on the site.

4 METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 The archaeological evaluation comprised six trial trenches between 22 and 25m long and 1.8m wide (Figure 2).
- 4.2 Ground reduction was carried out under archaeological supervision using a 7-ton wheeled mechanical excavator fitted with a 1.8m-wide toothless ditching bucket. Topsoil and subsoil deposits were removed in spits down to the level of the undisturbed natural geological deposits where potential archaeological features could be observed and recorded. Exposed surfaces were cleaned by trowel as appropriate and all further excavation was undertaken manually using hand tools.
- 4.3 The limits of excavations, heights above Ordnance Datum (m OD) and the locations of archaeological features and interventions were recorded using a Leica 1200 GPS rover unit with RTK differential correction, giving three-dimensional accuracy of 20mm or better.
- 4.4 Deposits or the removal of deposits judged by the excavating archaeologist to constitute individual events were each assigned a unique record number (often referred to within British archaeology as 'context numbers') and recorded on individual pre-printed forms (Taylor and Brown 2009). Archaeological processes recognised by the deposition of material are signified in this report by round brackets (thus), while events constituting the removal of deposits are referred to here as 'cuts' and signified by square brackets [thus]. The record numbers assigned to cuts and deposits are entirely arbitrary and in no way reflect the chronological order in which events took place. All features and deposits recorded during the evaluation are listed in Appendix 2. Artefacts recovered during excavation were assigned to the record number of the deposit from which they were retrieved.
- 4.5 Metal-detecting was carried out during the topsoil and subsoil stripping and throughout the excavation process. Archaeological features and spoil heaps were scanned by metal-detector. Only objects of modern date were found and were not retained for accession.

- 4.6 High-resolution digital photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits, and were used to keep a record of the excavation process.

5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS

5.1 Overview (Figure 2)

5.1.1 A cluster of large post-medieval chalk quarry pits ([15], [17] and [19]) were located in the southern part of Trench 3, in the central southern area of the site. Apart from a small modern pit ([13]) in Trench 2 and a natural tree hollow in Trench 6, there were no other archaeological features.

5.2 Buried ploughsoil (8)=(11)

5.2.1 All the trenches contained a buried former ploughsoil (8)=(11), comprising compact light to mid brown/ greyish-white silty clay with chalk inclusions, the latter deriving from the disturbed surface of the underlying natural chalk (7). This ploughsoil was generally between 0.20 and 0.40m deep but was up to 0.80m deep at the south end of Trench 3, where there would originally have been a slight dip or hollow in the site's topography.

5.2.2 The buried ploughsoil was sealed by modern garden soil (9), which was usually 0.30-0.50m deep. In some trenches (1 and 5), the build-up of garden soil was deeper (up to 0.80m in total), with a separate garden soil/ cultivation soil horizon (10) distinguishable below the present topsoil. The natural chalk was encountered at depths ranging from 0.53-1.30m below modern ground level, but was usually present at around 0.60-0.80m below the surface. The overburden was deeper at the west end of Trench 1, where the chalk was 1.00m below the present ground surface, and at the north-west end of Trench 5 (also 1.00m). The overburden was exceptionally deep at the south end of Trench 3, where the plough-soil had accumulated in a natural hollow and the natural chalk was 1.30m below modern ground level (52.45m OD).

5.3 Post-medieval chalk quarry pits [15], [17] and [19] (Figures 2 & 4; Plate 6)

5.3.1 Three large pits were located in the southern half of Trench 3, in the central southern part of the site. None of the pits were fully revealed within the confines of the trial trench but they appeared to all be roughly circular in plan and 4-5m across. There were numerous fragments of well-fired reddish-orange post-medieval brick and tile visible in the fill of the northernmost pit

([17]). A sherd of brown-glazed red earthenware was also found on its surface. A slot dug into the fill of the southernmost pit ([15]) found two fragments of well-fired post-medieval tile and a small sherd of brown-glazed red earthenware. As these pits entirely filled the southern half of the trench and all had fills very similar to the buried ploughsoil (8) into which they were cut, the southern two pits were not immediately seen during stripping and their upper levels were removed by machine. However, no other finds were present in the excavated spoil. The central pit ([19]) is presumed to also be post-medieval based on its physical proximity and similar size to Pits [15] and [17]. The three pits are likely to have been quarry pits dug to extract natural chalk. The small quantities of finds in their backfills suggest that they were located away from contemporary settlement. The machined surfaces of the pits were present at levels of 52.45-52.97m OD, between 0.97 and 1.30m below existing ground level.

5.4 Other Features (Figure 3; Plates 5 and 9-10)

- 5.4.1 A small square pit ([13]) was identified at the east end of Trench 2, at a level of 53.03m OD, 0.86m below the existing ground surface. It measured 1.2m across and 0.18m deep and had vertical sides and a flat base. A single small undiagnostic fragment of ceramic building material was present.
- 5.4.2 Although there were no obvious indications that Pit [13] was cut through the overlying deposits, it may well have been a recent geotechnical pit, possibly from the construction of the existing 1960s/70s house.
- 5.4.3 A tree hollow was present in the south of Trench 6, in the far south-east of the site. Until a few weeks prior to the evaluation, this area of the site had been covered with dense vegetation and numerous trees.

6 DISCUSSION

- 6.1 The evaluation identified a group of three large post-medieval chalk quarry pits in the central southern part of the site (Trench 3). These contained few finds and were probably located on peripheral land away from the core of the contemporary settlement.
- 6.2 Maps from the mid 18th to late 19th century show the site as agricultural land on the periphery of the village at Ashwell (Hulka 2012, Appendices 3.1-3.6). The former ploughsoil sealed beneath the modern garden soil derives from this land-use. By the 1930s, the village had expanded eastwards from its historic core and Ordnance Survey maps show small outbuildings and a belt of trees or an orchard on the site. The quarry pits could have been dug either when the site was arable farmland or during the early 20th century when the site was on the periphery of the growing settlement.

7 CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 The post-medieval chalk quarrying identified by the evaluation is typical of areas on the peripheries of settlements and is of limited archaeological significance.
- 7.2 Despite the site's location adjacent to one of the routes of the Icknield Way/Roman Ashwell Street, and close to the source of the River Rhee, no earlier archaeological remains were present in the trial trenches.

8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 8.1 Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd would like to thank Chis Clarke of CgMs Consulting for commissioning the evaluation on behalf of Miller Homes, and Andy Instone of Hertfordshire County Council Historic Environment Team for monitoring the project.

9 BIBLIOGRAPHY

9.1 Printed Sources

Clarke, C. 2014 *Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Evaluation. 61 Station Road, Ashwell, Hertfordshire.* CgMs Consulting (unpublished)

Hulka, K. 2012 *Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment. 61 Station Road, Ashwell, Hertfordshire.* Heritage Collective LLP Project No. 12/0569 (unpublished)

9.2 Websites

1) British Geological Survey 2014 Geology of Britain Viewer <http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html?location=IP9%203DG>. Date accessed 5th June 2014.

Figure 1 Site location

Figure 2 Trench location

Figure 3 Trench 2 plan

Figure 4 Trench 3 plan

10 APPENDIX 1: PLATES



Plate 1: Central part of the site, view west



Plate 2: South-eastern part of the site, view south



Plate 3: Trench 1, view west (no archaeological features)



Plate 4: Trench 2, view east (test pit into natural chalk in middle ground)



Plate 5: Pit [13] (Trench 2), view east



Plate 6: Post-medieval Quarry Pit [15] (and Quarry Pits [19] and [17] in middle ground) (Trench 3), view north



Plate 7: Trench 4, view northeast (no archaeological features)



Plate 8: Trench 5, view northwest (no archaeological features)



Plate 9: Trench 6, view northwest. Natural tree hollow in middle ground



Plate 10: Tree hollow (Trench 6), view west

11 APPENDIX 2: CONTEXT INDEX

Context	Cut	Type	Category	Period	Interpretation	Trench Number
1	N/A	Trench	Trench No.	N/A	N/A	1
2	N/A	Trench	Trench No.	N/A	N/A	2
3	N/A	Trench	Trench No.	N/A	N/A	3
4	N/A	Trench	Trench No.	N/A	N/A	4
5	N/A	Trench	Trench No.	N/A	N/A	5
6	N/A	Trench	Trench No.	N/A	N/A	6
7	N/A	Layer	Geology	Geological	Natural chalk	All
8	N/A	Layer	Overburden	Undated	Buried ploughsoil	2, 3, 4, 5, 6
9	N/A	Layer	Overburden	Modern	Garden soil	All
10	N/A	Layer	Overburden	Modern	Buried garden soil	1, 5
11	N/A	Layer	Overburden	Undated	Buried ploughsoil	1
12	N/A	Layer	Overburden	Modern	Made ground	5
13	13	Cut	Pit	Modern	Geotechnical pit?	2
14	13	Fill	Pit	Modern	Geotechnical pit?	2
15	15	Cut	Pit	Post-medieval	Chalk quarry pit	3
16	15	Fill	Pit	Post-medieval	Gradual silting-up	3
17	17	Cut	Pit	Post-medieval	Chalk quarry pit	3
18	17	Fill	Pit	Post-medieval	Gradual silting-up	3
19	19	Cut	Pit	Post-medieval	Chalk quarry pit	3
20	19	Fill	Pit	Post-medieval	Gradual silting-up	3

12 APPENDIX 3: OASIS FORM

OASIS ID: preconst1-181410

Project details

Project name	61 Station Rd, Ashwell, Herts: Evaluation
Short description of the project	A six-trench archaeological evaluation was carried out by Pre-Construct Archaeology on land at 61 Station Road, Ashwell, Hertfordshire (NGR TL 27433 39873) on 11th - 12th June 2014. The archaeological work was commissioned by CgMs Consulting on behalf of Miller Homes, in advance of proposed residential development. The aim of the work was to characterise the archaeological potential of the site. The evaluation identified a cluster of post-medieval chalk quarry pits. These were cut through a buried plough-soil deriving from use of the site as arable farmland up until the c. 1930s. Apart from a single small modern pit and a tree hollow, no other archaeological features were present. The results of the trial-trenching are of limited significance.
Project dates	Start: 11-06-2014 End: 12-06-2014
Previous/future work	Yes / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	HSRA14 - Sitecode
Any associated project reference codes	12/02079/1 - Planning Application No.
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	None
Current Land use	Other 5 - Garden
Monument type	QUARRY PIT Post Medieval
Significant Finds	POTTERY Post Medieval
Significant Finds	BRICK Post Medieval
Significant Finds	TILE Post Medieval

Methods & techniques	"Sample Trenches"
Development type	Rural residential
Prompt	Planning condition
Position in the planning process	After full determination (eg. As a condition)

Project location

Country	England
Site location	HERTFORDSHIRE NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE ASHWELL 61 Station Road
Postcode	SG7 5LR
Study area	0.72 Hectares
Site coordinates	TL 2743 3987 52.0421273775 -0.141784242657 52 02 31 N 000 08 30 W Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 51.20m Max: 54.00m

Project creators

Name of Organisation	Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited
Project brief originator	Andy Instone, Hertfordshire County Council Planning Archaeologist
Project design originator	CgMs Consulting
Project director/manager	Mark Hinman
Project supervisor	Tom Woolhouse
Type of sponsor/funding body	Developer
Name of	Miller Homes

sponsor/funding
body

Project archives

Physical Archive Exists?	No
Digital Archive recipient	Ashwell Museum
Digital Archive ID	HSRA14
Digital Contents	"none"
Digital Media available	"Images raster / digital photography", "Text"
Digital Archive notes	Digital photos and report text
Paper Archive recipient	Ashwell Museum
Paper Archive ID	HSRS14
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Paper Media available	"Context sheet", "Drawing", "Plan", "Section", "Unpublished Text", "Survey "

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