

King's Bromley, Staffordshire
An Archaeological Evaluation Alongside the A513

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Introduction

This short report outlines the results of a small archaeological evaluation carried out prior to the widening of a section of the A513, 0.5km east of King's Bromley, Staffordshire (NGR. SK 134166). The work was commissioned by Staffordshire County Council and undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit between the 13th and 15th of August 1990.

The Site

The site was located on a grass verge on the south side of the road, opposite Eastfields Farm (Fig. 1). Crop mark evidence from aerial photographs (J. Pickering Sk1316/3 and /21, Staffordshire Sites and Monuments Record), indicate a complex history of land use in the area. A palimpsest of field systems include a series of pit alignments, presumed to belong to the Bronze Age. Three of these alignments, a double and a single alignment, appeared to cross the area of the proposed road widening scheme. The crop marks also suggest the presence of several ring ditches, thought to be the ploughed out remains of Bronze Age round barrows, although none are threatened by the current development.

Staffordshire County Council undertook a resistivity survey (Welch 1990) and commissioned Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit to undertake a gradiometer survey (Jones 1990), to locate possible archaeological features prior to the positioning of the evaluation trenches. The two geophysical surveys respected a common grid, measuring 120m by 10m, to facilitate cross-reference. Both identified possible features, some of which appeared to coincide with the plotted positions of the pit alignments observed on the aerial photographs.

The Evaluation

Two trenches were excavated within the area threatened by the development. Their location was designed to cross the projected lines of the pit alignments and to coincide with the most promising anomalies recorded during the geophysical surveys. Trench 1 measured 45m by 5m and was located at the western end of the surveyed area to investigate anomalies which were thought to possibly represent the double pit alignment (Welch 1990, 3: D; and Jones 1990, 7: A14 and A15). Trench 2 was located towards the eastern end of the surveyed area in order to investigate anomalies which were thought to possibly represent the single pit alignment (Welch 1990, 3: J and K; and Jones 1990, 7: A3).

In both trenches the ploughsoil, consisting of a grey-brown silty sand 0.35m thick, was removed using a JCB with a 2m wide toothless bucket. The underlying yellow-brown fine sand was then cleaned using shovels, hoes and trowels to define any archaeological features present. A sample area of the yellow-brown sand in Trench 1, 20m by 3.5m, was subsequently excavated to a depth of 0.3m to ensure that no archaeological features remained unidentified following the initial cleaning.

Numerous shallow linear features cutting the yellow-brown sand criss-crossed both trenches. They were orientated north-south and east-west, were irregularly spaced, and were interpreted as relatively recent ploughmarks. Two slightly more substantial linear features (F1 in Trench 1 and F2 in Trench 2) were sample excavated. F1 was orientated north-south and was 0.4m wide and 0.12m deep. F2 was orientated east-west and was 0.5m wide and 0.16m deep. Both were filled with a grey-brown silty sand similar to the ploughsoil, and may be the remnants of a pre-enclosure ridge and furrow field system.

No features corresponding to the shape and dimensions of the pits suggested by the cropmarks and the geophysical surveys could be identified despite careful cleaning. Neither did they become apparent following the excavation of the sample area of the yellow-brown sand in Trench 1. At a depth of 0.1m this became lighter in colour with more frequent rounded pebbles, and clearly represented the natural sub-soil.

Discussion

The apparent anomalies recorded during the geophysical surveys may perhaps relate to modern disturbances within the ploughsoil. In particular, several lumps of iron slag recovered from the ploughsoil during machining may have caused at least some of the anomalies recorded during the gradiometer survey. The absence of features corresponding to the crop marks recorded on the aerial photographs is rather more difficult to explain. The clarity of the pit alignments observed on the aerial photographs in the field to the south

makes it extremely unlikely that they represent 'shadows' within the ploughsoil. It can only be concluded that the alignments are interrupted just before reaching the area of the evaluation and do not actually cross the area investigated. One of the aerial photographs suggests that the most easterly of the alignments reappears in the field to the north of the modern road.

Acknowledgements

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References

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A Resistivity Survey Near King's Bromley, Staffordshire, Staffordshire County Council.

KING'S BROMLEY 1990 Site Location

