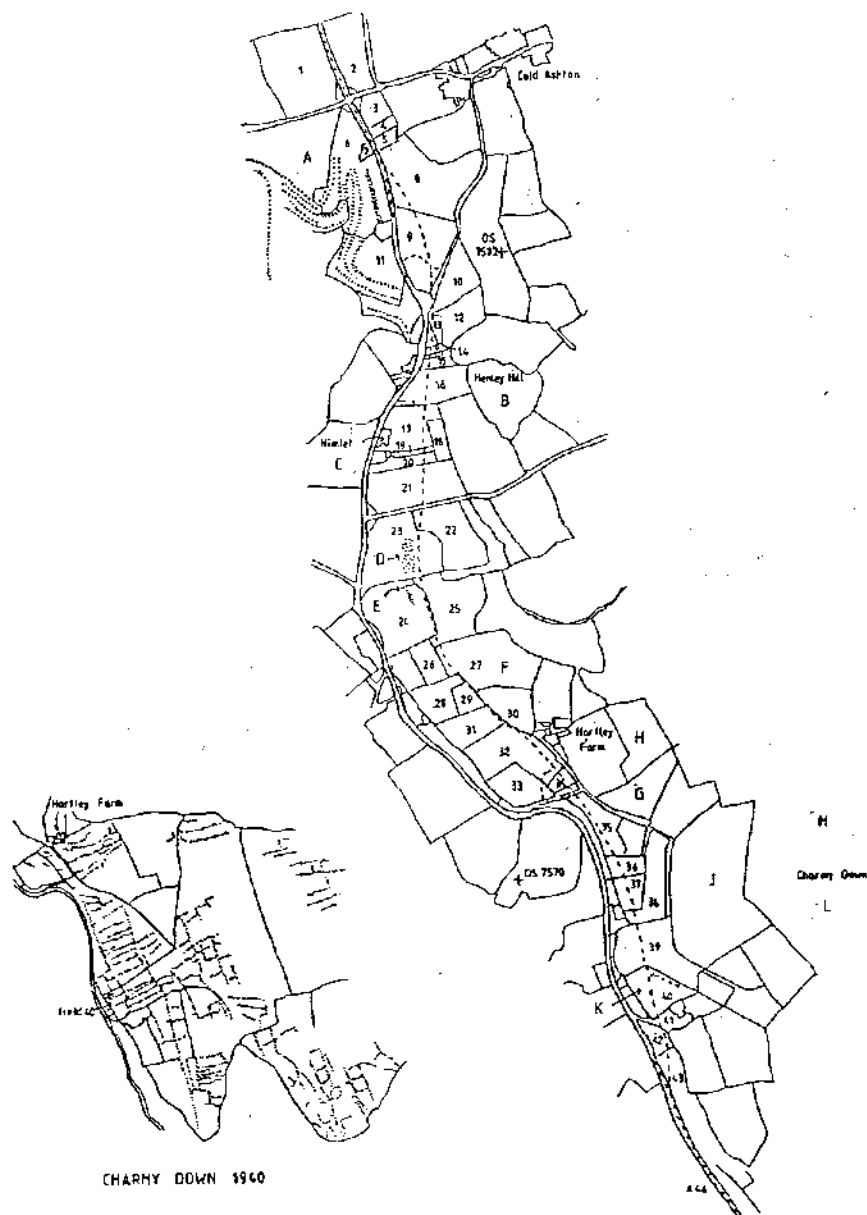


A46 ROAD IMPROVEMENT

an archaeological assessment



by Peter Ellis

A46 Road Improvements: An Archaeological Assessment

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report summarises the archaeological implications of a major road scheme north of Bath, the data deriving from an assessment project undertaken in 1987/8 on behalf of Avon County Council, sponsored by the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England. Improvement to the A46, 4km north-east of Bath, will involve the rerouting of 3.4km of the existing road to carry traffic across the top of Charmy Down rather than, as at present, along the unstable hill slopes. The road works, which will be the responsibility of the Department of Transport, are likely to be carried out in the financial year 1988/9.
- 1.2 The oolitic limestone plateau of the Cotswolds has been exploited for millennia and there are many indications of a land use sequence from the mesolithic onward (Saville 1980, 1984). In addition it is clear that the southern part of the Cotswolds in the neighbourhood of Bath was more intensively utilised in the Roman period than other parts of the plateau (RCHM 1976, Hanley 1986; Blockley 1985, Russett 1985). In general the Cotswold evidence comprises perhistoric funerary monuments and flint debitage, plough damaged Romano-British sites, and medieval sites on the hill slopes. Excavation, however, has generally revealed complex inter-related occupation sequences.
- 1.3 The road line crosses the archaeologically sensitive area of Charmy Down where previous fieldwork, aerial reconnaissance and excavation have all been employed to demonstrate diverse land uses over a long period (Grimes 1960). To the north of the Down, fieldwork during this project has suggested a Romano-British site and, in addition, the road is likely to cross ancient routeways suggested for this area (ibid. 200).
- 1.4 Following an outline of the work carried out for this assessment and a summary of the existing archaeological data for the road line, the

evidence is discussed and recommendations made for rescue work during road construction.

2. The assessment project

- 2.1 Those fields which will be affected by the road works have been consecutively numbered from north to south (figure). An appendix to this report details the work carried out and the archaeological data for each of the fields on the road line. During the project the road line has been walked on several occasions, and those fields under the plough in 1987/8 have been additionally and more intensively field-walked (field numbers 9, 15, 16, 23, 24, 26 and 31). Earthworks in field 40 have been surveyed (at a scale of 1:1250), and a geophysical survey has been commissioned and carried out in fields 40 and 23. A photographic record has been made of the WWII airfield features and further photographic work is planned by the County Council. The parish tithe maps for Cold Ashton, St. Catherines and Swainswick have been consulted, and the Sites and Monuments Records of both Avon County Council and the Roman Bath Museum have been used (their database is identical for this area). Aerial photographs have been consulted at Avon County Council and the National Monuments Record. All the available air photographs have been examined with the exception of the post-war RAF coverage.

3. The archaeology of the road line

- 3.1 The figure shows the location of the following Avon County Council SMR sites together with hitherto unrecorded areas of archaeological importance. The details of the SMR sites are not duplicated here.
- 3.2 A SMR number 2015. Strip lynchets. An exceptionally well preserved medieval group. Their context is not altogether clear but they must be associated with medieval settlement at Cold Ashton, 0.5km distant.
- B SMR 4717 Mesolithic finds
- C Nimlet. The modern cluster of houses on the A46 may coincide

with an earlier settlement. However, the position of D below, back from the road, may indicate some repositioning of earlier routes, and a precursor of Nimlet may lie to its east. The name indicates a place of religious significance (Barker 1986, 16), perhaps with a Romano-British or earlier origin.

D Field 23. Fieldwalking here has produced a collection of Romano-British pottery slightly to the west of the road line, the main concentration covering an area of c. 60m by 40m. The sherds are small and abraded and have clearly been subjected to much churning by the plough. The assemblage (c. 100 sherds have been collected as a sample) is characteristically 3rd/4th-century with roughly equal proportions of Severn Valley and local grey wares, and some Black Burnished ware. There are few diagnostic sherds with the exception of a single sherd of Oxfordshire red mortaria (later than 260AD). There was no samian.

E Field 24. Slight earthwork banks are visible which may represent a ploughed-down remnant of a northward extension of the Charmy Down field system. The banks are overlain by a concreted road and area which may have formed part of the airfield complex.

F Field 27. A ruined limekiln giving its name to the field by 1839.

G SMR 2032. Finds of multi-period flint implements. Discussed by Grimes (1960, 203).

H SMR 2025 & 2027. Barrows excavated by Williams (1950) and Grimes (1960).

J SMR 1697, 1706, 1707, 2026, 2037. Celtic fields and enclosure earthworks largely destroyed by 1941. Discussed in Grimes (1960, 223).

K Field 40. A surviving area of Celtic fields on the road line. The earthworks have been recorded (figure) and a geophysical survey undertaken. The embanked terraces in the north west part of the field seem to be an isolated enclosure-like addition to the main field group here (Grimes 1960, fig 80). There may be a trackway below the main terrace. It is possible that part of an occupied enclosure and a track are represented within the field.

L The WWII airfield. The road line will destroy various

concrete and brick-built structures in fields 32, 35, 36, 37, 38. These have been identified as air-raid shelters and Nissen huts (Roberts 1981).

- 3.3 It is clear that there is a considerable potential for salvage work during the construction of the road. Although it is possible at this stage to highlight various areas and suggest foci of attention, the road construction process will itself set the conditions for the recovery of archaeological information, and a flexible response will be necessary.
- 3.4 There are four phases of activity on Charmy Down which may be usefully distinguished. The first, neolithic or early Bronze Age, preceding the Celtic fields, the second represented by the development of the fields from the late Bronze Age to late Roman, the third phase is the late Roman landscape abandoned at some point soon after the 4th century AD as a result of changing agronomy, and the fourth is the following period till the post-medieval when the Down was used for sheep grazing.
- 3.5 The landscape of field boundaries, trackways, enclosures and apparent farm sites, recorded by Grimes on Charmy Down, represents a moment in time when sheep-grazing superceded field cultivation on the Down. Although the landscape contained elements which may well have originated in the Bronze Age, and the routeways, as Grimes showed, clearly predated these last phases of cultivation, it is essentially to phase 3 that the landscape belongs.
- 3.6 The construction of the road is likely to reveal evidence primarily of the first and third phases, as happened earlier this century when renewed cultivation destroyed the field boundaries. Two types of evidence were then recorded, the lithic debitage associated with neolithic communities in a landscape predating the Celtic fields, and late Roman pottery and coins. There is a good possibility of neolithic occupation on the Down as the chance find of a pit by Grimes shows. However, under watching brief conditions it will be

good fortune to recover more than flint tools. The later Roman evidence is likely to be the most prolific and it may be possible to record a coherent picture.

- 3.7 Highlighting the third phase in this way suggests that there was little recorded by Grimes which was not being utilised in the 4th century AD, despite its early origin. It is unlikely that the fields were only part-cultivated at this period of prosperity, and equally unlikely that abandoned Iron Age farm sites survived untouched in the fields. In other words the occupation and enclosure areas suggested by Grimes are most likely to be late-Roman farms with associated fields and trackways representing those in use in the late 4th-century.
- 3.8 An alternative to this model is more likely to be the insertion of later hendre or hafod associated with sheep management, than earlier abandoned farms.
- 3.9 The extent of the damage caused by the WWII airfield is unknown. The presence of a massive amount of overburden dumped in field 39 is suspicious, but it seems more likely that groundwork for the airfield was kept to a minimum and that damage has only been superficial. It is to be hoped that below ground ditches and pits may have survived.
- 3.10 The key to testing the various hypotheses advanced for the archaeology of Charny Down lies, as Grimes recognised, in an understanding of the occupation sites within the fields. It is possible that in field 40, or elsewhere, some indications of these sites may be salvaged.
- 3.11 In summary it appears that both on Charny Down and to the north, careful archaeological observation is likely to be rewarding despite the watching brief circumstances. The range of possible 'sites' is great, from neolithic, through possible Bronze Age occupation and barrows, to post-Roman sites.

4. Recommendations

- 4.1 A research design and prospectus of work has been submitted to HBMC(E) requesting support not only for a watching brief during road construction, but also for an initial small scale excavation of the extant Celtic fields and possible settlement complex in field 40. Here it is proposed that an adequate record be made of the morphology of the field banks and that palaeo-environmental work be carried out on potential buried soils surviving beneath the banks. An area within the terraces to the north west, and a transect westward, will also be excavated.
- 4.2 An archaeological presence will be necessary throughout the early period of road construction and it is envisaged that some salvage excavation will be necessary.
- 4.3 In view of this, it is recommended that local societies be alerted to the archaeological potential of the road.
- 4.4 The contractors should be approached as soon as possible so that good relations be established. In particular the difficulties of insurance, particularly for volunteers, need to be dealt with early.
- 4.5 The construction of this new road line is likely to result in the destruction of a considerable number of archaeological features ranging over a long time span. As a corollary, provided that the archaeological response is adequate, it should also result in a significant increase in our knowledge of the archaeology of the area.

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A46 Table Summary of project data

<u>Field No.</u>	<u>Land use</u>	<u>Field Name 1839/41/43</u>	<u>Field Walking</u>	<u>Other Details</u>
1	grass	Long Tynning		
2	"	"		
3	"	Parson's Lynch		
4	"	?" (unnamed)		
5	"	?" (unnamed)		
6	"	In Parson's ditch		
7	house & garden	in the field		non-conformist chapel (not present in 1841)
8	grass	Strawborough		
9	arable	"	post-medieval finds	
10	grass	Hyde Park		
11	"	Cattle Hill		
12	"	Hyde Park		
13	"	In Whiteway		
14	House & Garden	house & garden	stone mound in N corner	house marked alongside road in 1841
15	arable	Whiteway	post-medieval finds	
16	"	In Whiteway	"	
17	grass	Nemletts Gate Tynning		
18	"	The Lye		
19	"	Nemlett Gate Tynning		
20	"	"		
21	"	The Lye		
22	arable	Hawkwell		
23	"	The Lye	RB pottery	
24a	grass	Great field	earthworks	
24b	arable	Great field	post-medieval finds	
25	arable	Clay Pool	"	
26	"	Great field	"	? early routeway, Grimes 202, Taylors 1771 map
27	"	Lime Kiln ground	"	"
28	grass & buildings	Great field	"	"

<u>Field No.</u>	<u>Land use</u>	<u>Field Name 1839/41/43</u>	<u>Field Walking</u>	<u>Other Details</u>
29	"	Grat field		"
30	grass	Lime kiln ground		= Grimes field I
31	arable	Great Plain	post-med & modern finds	= Grimes field IV
32	grass & buildings	Great Plain		= Grimes field IV
33	arable	Little Plain	post-med finds	= Grimes field V
34	grass & buildings	Little Plain		= Grimes field VI
35	grass & WWII buildings	Hartley Down		= Grimes field XIX
36	"	"		= Grimes XIX & possible track EW
37	"	"		"
38	"	"		=Grimes field XIX
39	trees etc.	Customary Down		c.1.5m of overburden on Grimes XIX
40	grass	"	see survey report	= Grimes field XXXVIII
41	farmyard & waste	Turnpike quarry		= Grimes XXXIX
42	grass	Westwood coppice		on hill slope, pond
43	trees & undergrowth	"		on hill slope

