

**Land at Middleton and Oakgrove,
Milton Keynes,
Buckinghamshire:
An Archaeological Desk-Based
Assessment, 2003**

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By
Kirsty Nichol

For further information please contact:
Birmingham Archaeology
The University of Birmingham
Edgbaston
Birmingham B15 2TT
Tel: 0121 414 5513
Fax: 0121 414 5516
E-Mail: bham-arch@bham.ac.uk
Web Address: <http://www.barch.bham.ac.uk/bufau>

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Summary

An archaeological assessment was carried out in October 2003 in advance of redevelopment proposals for land on the eastern edge of Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire (NGR SP 880 387). The work was commissioned by White Young Green on behalf of English Partnerships, and was undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology. The site was recently designated as a Millennium Community, one of only seven in England. The development proposal involves the construction of 1,700 new dwellings and associated infrastructure including community and retail facilities. The assessment concluded that the majority of the site had been destroyed by mineral extraction and was subsequently used for landfill and ground levels restored. However, three areas were identified as having potential for surviving archaeological remains.

1.0 Introduction

This archaeological desk-based assessment has been prepared by Birmingham Archaeology as part of the consideration of a planning application submitted by White Young Green on behalf of English Partnerships. The location of the site, hereafter referred to as the study area, is shown on Fig. 1. The aim of the report is to provide a summary of known and potential archaeological information for the study area, based on existing data, in order to enable appropriate archaeological mitigation strategies to be devised if required. The assessment adheres to a written scheme of investigation and guidelines set down in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessments* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999).

2.0 Location of Study Area (Fig. 2)

The study area, covering approximately 51 hectares, with 26 hectares of developable land, lies immediately to the west of the historic core of Milton Keynes Village (NGR SP 880 387). It comprises two areas (Fig. 2) which are bisected by Brickhill Street. To the east, nearest to Milton Keynes Village, lies the area of Middleton, with Oakgrove occupying the western side of the road. The overall study area is bounded to the east by Milton Keynes Village, Chaffron Way to the south, and the River Ouzel, and Ouzel Valley Park, to the north and west. Land use in the study area is currently rough pasture and scrub.

3.0 Objectives

The objectives of this assessment were to determine the likely survival and significance of archaeological remains within the study area, to identify the need for any further

archaeological work in advance of the planning application, and to identify potential requirements for any *in situ* preservation of archaeological remains, or for their recording in advance of, or during, development.

4.0 Method

A site inspection of the study area was carried out, which involved walking over the entire area proposed for redevelopment. Documentary research included consulting the Milton Keynes Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), the primary database of known archaeological and historical sites for the area and secondary archaeological and historical sources.

5.0 Geology and Topography

Much of the region is overlain by glacial boulder clays, with both glacial and alluvial gravel deposits found in the Ouse and Ouzel valleys (Zeepvat 1993, 49). The study area sits on the eastern bank of the Ouzel, with Middleton on a slight rise overlooking the valley, and Oakgrove partially occupying the floodplain and adjacent river terrace. Several episodes of alluviation are known to have taken place in the vicinity of the River Ouzel.

6.0 Site Inspection

The site inspection revealed that limited elements of relic landscape survived along the western periphery of the study area, on the boundary with Ouzel Valley Park. An old field boundary, that includes several old willow trees, runs along the western edge of the study area, and a small section of old field boundary (Plate 1), the ditch of which has survived in part, was also observed. All other field boundaries in the study area are modern, and date to the period of reinstatement and landscaping of the site following landfill (Plates 2 and 3). These modern features include an open ditch cutting through Oakgrove on a roughly north-south alignment (Plate 4), and a pond and marshy area immediately to the east (Plate 5). A second, smaller pond (Plate 6) was observed in the Middleton area of the site as well as small pockets of coppice. Also, in the south eastern corner of the Middleton area was the remains of the original road into Milton Keynes Village (Plate 7) which was bypassed when the new dual carriageway was constructed.

7.0 Cartographic Evidence

An Estate map, surveyed in 1685 (Fig. 3), reveals that the study area was situated in open fields. It also gives some indication of the crops being grown on the estate at that time, such as Rye and Oats, and identifies Great and Little Oakgrove to the west. Later Estate maps dating to 1789 and 1838 show fields had been further subdivided and the names

changed. In 1789 (Fig. 4) the majority of the land within the study area was farmed by tenant farmer William Pancoust, who also had land on the southern and eastern fringes of the parish. The majority of this land was under pasture, with the exception of the Northward and Southward Woad Grounds which were arable. The growing of woad is indicative of good quality loam, as woad can only be grown in well cultivated and manured soil. However, the crop was regularly rotated as yield dropped dramatically after two seasons within the same piece of land. Land along the southern side, and south-western corner of the study area was tenanted by a widow, Mrs Head and her son, John Head, their fields were under pasture or grass seed at the time of the survey.

By 1838 George Payne was the tenant farming the majority of land within the study area (Fig. 5). Once again, fields were mostly under pasture, with the exception of the Woad Grounds and Wrens Park which were arable. Land along the southern edge of the study area was farmed by Joseph Atterbury, and was a mixture of pasture and arable at this time. It seems likely that Joseph may have been a descendant of the famous Jacobite Bishop of Rochester, Francis Atterbury, who was born in the former parsonage house in the village (VCH 1927, 401).

The First Edition Ordnance Survey Map (dating to 1888) shows that the study area was still being used for agricultural purposes. There had been little change in the overall layout of the fields, and a large pond is depicted in the centre of the Middleton part of the study area. This may have been linked with the complex of fishponds associated with the 14th century moated manor house which was situated just to the north of the study area by the church. A plan of the earthworks reproduced in Croft and Maynard (1993, 126) shows some of the leats associated with the water management system of the fishponds extending into the northern part of the study area adjacent to the church.

Later maps reveal that the study area remained undeveloped until it was used for quarrying by Hartigans in the 1960s. An aerial photograph taken in 1946 (Fig. 6) shows the layout of the medieval field systems surrounding the village, with ridge and furrow still present. A later aerial photograph (taken in 1985) shows the extent of Hartigans Gravel Quarry, as it was at this time, within the study area (Fig. 7).

8.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

8.1 Previous Archaeological Work (Fig. 8)

The Milton Keynes Sites and Monuments Record reveals that the majority of sites known in the study area have been destroyed by quarrying activity. However, the former Milton Keynes Archaeological Unit undertook excavations across the site during the quarrying operations. Occupation from the later Bronze Age to the early Saxon period was recorded across the site, with settlement concentrated along the southern limit of the second gravel terrace (Williams 1993). Romano British activity appears to have been confined to the first century AD, however a much more extensive Romano-British settlement was excavated on the adjacent site of Monkston Park (see below). Early Saxon features included a sunken-floored building, pits and a well. The site appears to

have been abandoned some time in the 7th Century (*ibid*). As well as the site of the quarry itself a small area outside its extent, in the northern part of Oakgrove, was the focus of an archaeological evaluation in 1989 (hachured area on plan), this also identified features of possible Iron Age, Roman and Early Saxon date.

On the northeastern edge of the village in 1967 a total of seven burials were uncovered during quarrying (Mynard 1968). Groundworks associated with the extension of the Community Centre Carpark in 1992, unearthed a burial ground (Parkhouse *et al*, 1998). A minimum of 97 individuals were recovered, and radiocarbon dates on two revealed that they were of Late Saxon date, probably 10th century, the intercutting nature of the graves suggested that the cemetery had been in use for an extended period of time.

A desk-top assessment undertaken on the site at Oakgrove revealed that modern quarrying had destroyed all archaeological deposits that had once been contained within the bounds of the site (Hylton *et al* 2000a).

A programme of archaeological work on the adjacent site of Monkston Park revealed evidence for activity during the Bronze Age and Iron Age periods. Excavation here also revealed four consecutive phases of Roman settlement from the 1st to the 4th century AD (Hylton *et al* 2000b). A gold hoard, including two torcs and 3 bracelets which were associated with a ceramic vessel, was also found on the site (pers. comm. Brian Giggins).

It is believed that the some time during the late medieval period (15th-16th centuries) the parish was divided into three large field districts; North Field, Town Field, and Kingsbridge Field. The study area is located in the northern part of what was called the Town Field (Fig. 9).

8.2 Historical Profile of Study Area

The study area is situated in the parish of Middleton, which was recorded in Domesday as Mideltone, incorporating Keynes in the 12th century from the de Kaynes family, Lords of the Manor (TVAT 2003), it latterly became Milton. The parish remained a closed village, under single ownership and let to tenant farmers, until the middle of the 20th century when the Milton Keynes Development Corporation was established to oversee the construction of the New Town (*ibid*). The study area lies just to the west of the historic core of Milton Keynes Village, the church of All Saints and the site of the original moated manor lie just outside its bounds.

It is clear from the wealth of surviving archaeological deposits already excavated within the study area, and on the adjacent site at Monkston Park, that this landscape has been occupied fairly intensively since prehistoric times. Although there has been extensive quarrying across the site, there remains the potential for the current study area to contain similar archaeological deposits around its periphery, these would contribute to our understanding of the prehistoric and later landscape. The cartographic evidence suggests that the study area was in use as arable and pasture land, remaining in agricultural use until the quarry was established in the 1960s.

9.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Preservation was originally good across the site due to the protective layers of alluvium encountered on the flood plain of the Ouzel. However, the majority of the study area lies on slightly higher ground, above the marsh and the flood plain of the river. This, and the extensive quarrying activity across the site in recent decades means that archaeological deposits may only survive in pockets across the site, these are outlined on Fig. 10. Important paleoenvironmental deposits and the remains of early occupation on the site may still survive close to the river (Area A), evidence for the middle Saxon period, an important, and, as yet, unexplored period in the history of the village may survive near to the church (Area B). The area around the original road into the village (Area C), although outside the historic core of the village, may contain evidence of the medieval field systems visible on aerial photographs and earlier deposits. All recommendations are preliminary and the ultimate decision lies with the County Archaeological Officer. A watching brief may be appropriate in Areas A and B, with trial trenching in Area C.

10.0 Acknowledgements

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