

**Woolhampton Quarry,
Woolhampton, Berkshire:
An Archaeological
Watching Brief 2005**

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An Archaeological Watching Brief 2005**

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*Archaeological Appraisal and Scheme for Archaeological Investigations:
Area 3 Woolhampton Quarry, Woolhampton, West Berkshire. PC176A*

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SUMMARY

In April and May 2005 Birmingham Archaeology undertook an archaeological watching brief at Woolhampton Quarry, Woolhampton, Berkshire (centred on NGR SU570660). The watching brief was commissioned by Phoenix Consulting Archaeology Limited on behalf of Lafarge Aggregates Limited. The purpose of the watching brief was to observe the removal of topsoil prior to quarrying. No archaeological features or deposits were recorded, although some medieval and post-medieval pottery was recovered from the topsoil, along with a small quantity of animal bone.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Woolhampton Quarry, Woolhampton, Berkshire (centred on NGR SU570660) by Birmingham Archaeology in April and May 2005. The watching brief was commissioned by Phoenix Consulting Archaeology Limited on behalf of Lafarge Aggregates Limited, and required that the topsoil stripping programme was monitored under archaeological supervision prior to the start of quarrying.

2.0 SITE LOCATION AND GEOLOGY

Woolhampton Quarry, hereafter known as the site, is centred on NGR SU 570 660 and lies on the southern floodplain of the River Kennet. The site is bounded by the river to the north and a minor road to the east. The mineral deposits here are valley bottom gravels known as the Woolhampton Gravel Formation. These are overlain by more recent floodplain deposits – a mixture of silts, peats and tufas known as the Midgham Peat Formation. Thin, loamy topsoil is derived from this, much of which has been cultivated prior to quarrying. A more detailed assessment of the geomorphology, sediments and soils can be found in reports by Collins (1993) and Jordan (1993).

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Assessments of the whole quarry extension began in 1988 and have been carried out when necessary since then. These assessments have included desktop evaluations, field investigations and watching briefs. Prehistoric, Romano-British and medieval artefact scatters have been noted during various phases of work, although very few archaeological features have been identified positively. Peat extraction was carried out on a large scale in the area in the 18th and 19th centuries, and it has been suggested that this process may have destroyed any archaeological features that may have existed on the site (Leach and Hovey 1998).

4.0 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

The aim of the watching brief was to monitor topsoil stripping in one area of the quarry (Fig. 2) in order to determine the presence of archaeological features and deposits below the modern ground surface, and to attempt to add to the current understanding of the history and archaeology of the site.

The area to be quarried was stripped of topsoil by a 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. This process was carried out under archaeological supervision, and the exposed subsoil was recorded by means of *pro-forma* context sheets, supplemented by digital photographs of the stripped areas. These records, along with the artefact assemblage, form the site archive, which is currently stored at the offices of Birmingham Archaeology.

5.0 RESULTS

The depth of the topsoil (1004) varied greatly across the site, from 0.2m deep in some places to 0.85m deep in others. The subsoil (1005) beneath was very varied in colour, with mixed patches of grey, brown, orange and white sandy clay spreading across the area (Plate 1). Mature trees which lined a drainage ditch dividing the site had caused moderate root disturbance in the areas closest to the ditch.

No archaeological features or deposits were noted, although small amounts of animal bone and medieval and post-medieval pottery were recovered from the topsoil (1004). Two possible features were tested. A linear feature running parallel to the current drainage ditch was found to be a silted-up drainage ditch, and a second linear feature (1000) was understood to be connected with peat extraction (Plate 2). Neither of these features were bottomed since the height of the water table meant that they became flooded at a depth of *c.*0.45 – 0.5m. No dating evidence was recovered from either of these features.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

The lack of evidence for features of archaeological significance combined with further evidence of peat extraction is in line with expected results. Occasional unstratified finds of medieval and post-medieval date, along with fragments of animal bone do not enhance our understanding of land-use and other human activity in the area of the quarry. Should further topsoil stripping be required in this area it would be reasonable to maintain the level of monitoring currently adhered to.

7.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The watching brief was commissioned by Phoenix Consulting Archaeology Limited, on behalf of Lafarge Aggregates Limited. Thanks are due to Gary Coates and Dr. Andrew Richmond of Phoenix Archaeological Consultants Limited for providing advice and logistical support during the fieldwork. Thanks are also due to Keith

Brown the quarry manager at Woolhampton Quarry and the team from John Stacey Plant Hire for their support and co-operation during the watching brief. The watching brief was undertaken for Birmingham Archaeology by Erica Macey-Bracken, who also wrote this report. Illustrations were prepared by Bryony Ryder. Dr. Mark Hewson managed the project for Birmingham Archaeology and edited the report.

7.0 REFERENCES

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Fig.1

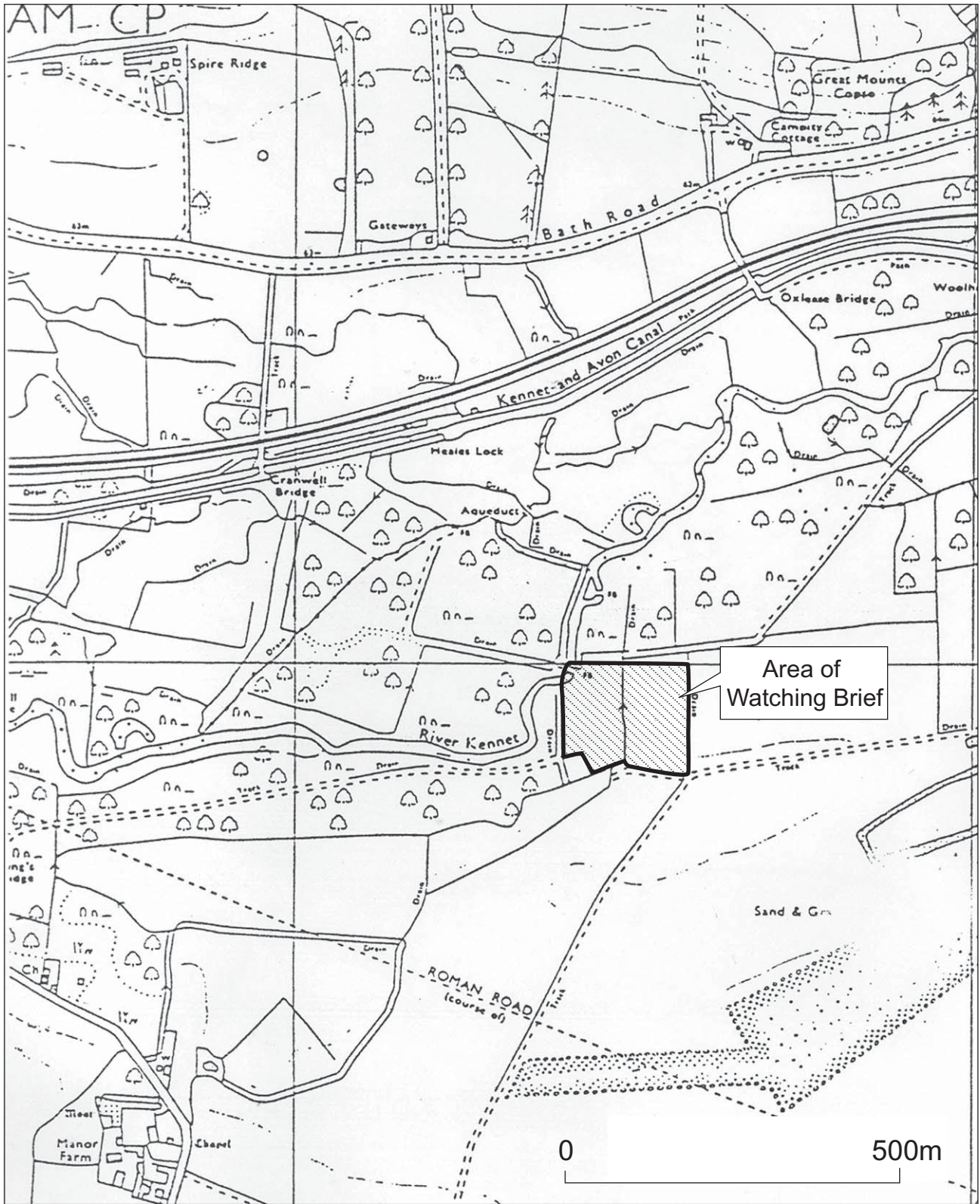


Fig.2



Plate 1



Plate 2