

**Channel Tunnel Rail Link
Union Railways (South) Ltd**

Project Area 330

**WATLING STREET
ARC WS 98**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION
INTERIM REPORT**

Contract S/300/0052 P381

MUSEUM OF LONDON

Museum of London Archaeology Service

September 1999

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Prepared by:
Date:
Checked by:
Date:
Approved by:
Position:
Date:

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**Museum of London Archaeology Service
87 Queen Victoria Street
London EC4V 4AB**

September 1999

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Museum of London Archaeology Service (MoLAS) was commissioned by Union Railways (South) Limited (URS) to undertake detailed archaeological investigations at Watling Street, Cobham, west of Rochester, Kent, in 1998 (Figure 1). This work formed part of an extensive programme of archaeological investigation carried out in advance of the construction of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL).
- 1.2 The site comprised five trenches laid out across the line of a modern road, Watling Street. Each trench was up to 50m long and up to 10m wide. They were positioned at intervals over a distance of 1km along the road and numbered 1 to 5 from east to west (Figure 2). The western extremity of this stretch of road (Trench 5) was at URL grid point 48050 49575, corresponding approximately to Ordnance Survey national grid reference (NGR) TQ 6805 6960, and the eastern extremity (Trench 1) was at URL grid point 49020 49520, corresponding to NGR TQ 6900 6950. The area of all five trenches totalled roughly 190 square metres. The ground in which the trenches were cut varied but was generally sloping down from south to north. Watling Street ran very near the southern edge of a modern road, the A2.
- 1.3 The method of investigation was specified as ‘strip, map and sample’. This entailed machine stripping of topsoil and other deposits to expose the archaeological horizons, constructing a plan of the exposed area, followed by sufficient hand excavation and sampling of all features to fulfil the project aims. The intention was to determine a broad picture of human occupation and land utilisation through time, in accordance with the archaeological aims set out in a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing the scope and methods of excavation, prepared by URL and agreed with English Heritage and the local authority. Work was undertaken in September and October 1998.
- Background*
- 1.4 The natural solid geology of the area consists of the Upper Chalk of the North Downs. The site lies on the northern dip-slope of the Downs, on the southern side of a dry valley running eastwards to the River Medway. In the area of the site the Upper Chalk is overlaid by Pleistocene drift deposits, generally clay-with-flints, with more recent local pockets of colluvial brickearth, a semi-porous fine sandy clay, and gravel.
- 1.5 A preliminary desk-top assessment conducted for URL (1994, vol 1, 107–113) identified the site as having possible archaeological interest. The vicinity of the site has yielded evidence for prehistoric and Roman occupation, an Anglo-Saxon cemetery and medieval farming and villages, and includes Cobham Park, a deer park and a designed landscape created in the 17th and 18th centuries. The road running through the site, Watling Street, was Roman in origin (Margary 1955, Road 1), and was the principal road between London and Dover, via Rochester, until the 20th century, when a second road, the modern A2, was built a short distance to the north of this stretch of Watling Street. A parish boundary stone dated 1808 was designated a listed building of special architectural and historic interest, grade II (URL 1994, vol 2, drawing 3017; vol 3, gazetteer 970). The site included the northern edge of Cobham Park, a registered historic park or garden (URL 1994, vol 4, B22–4; 1995, part 1, 38–41).
- 1.6 No specific prior archaeological evaluation was carried out on this site.

2 SUMMARY OF RESULTS

2.1 Periods Represented

2.1.1 Provisional dating evidence suggests that the following periods were represented in the archaeological data.

Medieval (c AD 1066–1500)

2.1.2 The hollow-way along which part of the existing Watling Street passed was sufficiently large, with mature oak, ash and sweet chestnut trees growing on it, to suggest that it was probably medieval in origin.

Post-medieval (c AD 1500–the present)

2.1.3 The character, materials and method of construction of a number of buildings and structures found indicated that none of them was likely to be older than post-medieval in date.

2.2 Feature Types

2.2.1 The buildings and structures found were partly cut through, or only lightly covered by, the existing topsoil. The underlying subsoil consisted of a thick deposit of colluvial silt, in which clayey gravel formed extensive, irregular lenses. There were almost no direct stratigraphic relationships between different features.

Hollow-way

2.2.2 In the eastern half of the site the existing road ran under a bank immediately to its south, in places 2m to 3m high, for a stretch of about 200m. Where the bank to the south was highest, the road also ran under a bank immediately to the north. In Trench 2 the bank to the south and part of the road were sectioned, revealing colluvial brickearth and gravel hill-wash deposits. No earlier road surfaces or ground surfaces were found.

Ha-ha or park pale

2.2.3 In Trench 5 earthworks to the south of the road were sectioned revealing a shallow ditch c 3m wide with a bank c 3m wide on the southern edge. The foot of the bank and the southern side of the ditch were revetted with roughly coursed chalk blocks. No more specific dating evidence was found. This feature is interpreted as a ha-ha or park pale marking the boundary of Cobham Park where it ran along the south edge of Watling Street, and was probably built when a deer park was established c 1700.

Buildings

2.2.4 In Trench 4 to the south of Watling Street the scattered and very shallow remains of one or more buildings were sectioned. The materials found (clay tiles, slates, unfrosted red bricks, decayed timbers and patches of gravel) and the location indicated that these were probably the remains of dog kennels documented as having been built there when the grounds of Cobham Park were landscaped by Humphry Repton c 1790. The kennels were later converted into poultry yards. Directly to the south of these buildings were fishponds and a steep, landscaped hillock.

Miscellaneous modern features

2.2.5 The southern side of Watling Street was lined discontinuously with decayed iron fencing, probably early 19th-century in date, much of it high enough to be a deer fence.

2.3 Artefactual Remains

Pottery

2.3.1 None was recovered.

Other artefacts

2.3.2 The surviving base of a boundary stone (2.2.4 above) was extracted, recorded and removed for safe-keeping.

2.4 Palaeo-Environmental and Economic Evidence

2.4.1 No deposits were considered suitable for taking environmental bulk soil samples. Soil conditions did not allow animal or other bone to be preserved.

3 FIELDWORK EVENT AIMS

- 3.1 'Previous desk-based works and ground survey have recorded an area of linear earthworks which may contain elements of Roman Watling Street, later road alignments and post-medieval park boundaries. As well as providing information on the development of a major transport artery through time, and its relationship to woodland and park boundaries, palaeoenvironmental information may be preserved in ditch fills and beneath embankments' (URL 1998).
- 3.2 The primary excavation aims were:
- to establish the origins and development of Roman Watling Street and its later development and use;
 - to establish the relationship of Watling Street and later roads with the Cobham Park boundary and other woodland boundaries;
 - to establish changes to the local environment through the recovery of palaeoenvironmental indicators from buried horizons beneath earthworks.
- 3.3 Preliminary results from the excavation appear to be able to meet only the aim of elucidating the relationship between the road and the boundary of Cobham Park.
- 3.4 Soil conditions were not conducive to the preservation of environmental remains. No charred remains or animal bones were found.

4 SUMMARY OF POTENTIAL

4.1 The site lies within the ‘landscape zone’ of the North Downs, also called ‘the A2 corridor’. The potential contribution of this site towards answering the research aims of the archaeological component of the CTRL can be considered under the following headings, taken from the *CTRL Archaeological Research Strategy*:

- towns and rural landscapes (100 BC–AD 1700);
- recent landscapes (AD 1700–1945).

4.2 The provisional results of the excavation of this site appear to offer information that can be placed under the broad headings above, but it should be noted that further study may alter these initial views.

4.3 These potential contributions are sometimes posed here in the form of specific questions, of a kind that post-excavation assessment of the data may be able to answer, or at least confirm are answerable.

4.4 Towns and rural landscapes (100 BC–AD 1700)

4.4.1 The road has clearly had a long existence here, presumably because the local topography offers an easy climb from the level of the River Medway to the upper slopes of the North Downs, leading westwards. Definite evidence of the Roman road, predecessor of the present road, seems to be lacking here. Soil conditions suggest that considerable erosion could have taken place in the last 2,000 years, effectively dispersing all road gravels and obliterating ditches and cuttings.

4.4.2 A Roman villa existed about 300m to the south of the modern road, successor to the main Roman road, with which the villa was presumably directly connected (URL 1994, vol 2, map 3017, & vol 3, gazetteer 1570). No sign was found of cultivation, occupation or roads datable to the Roman period nor, with the implied exception of the existing road, for any later period up to 1700. It is possible that evidence has been eroded, or perhaps the lack may be attributable to some, or all, of the site being wooded; if so, was this managed woodland producing a crop (e.g. chestnut timber for posts, rails and paling) for an urban as well as a rural market?

4.4.3 One or more lynchets (undated, but presumably a result of ploughing or erosion) have been observed apparently on both sides of the road, towards the eastern half of the site, as mentioned in the preliminary assessment (URL 1995, part 2, map 23).

4.4.4 The area seems to have been relatively underpopulated, and uncultivated, in the late medieval and post-medieval periods. Possibly the area of the site was deliberately put down to woodland, before its incorporation in the estate of Cobham Hall.

4.5 Recent landscapes (1700–1945)

4.5.1 In recent centuries the site could have been cultivated, rather than put down to wood or wood-pasture, but it appears to have been completely dominated by Cobham Hall, into whose estate it fell. The area appears to have been relatively unpopulated and uncultivated; was it ever cultivated, and if so, when did cultivation effectively end? Have alternative economic preferences operated for coppice and other woods, hunting preserves, or designed landscapes?

Is this economic regime attributable to a physical cause, such as the possible absence of

suitable water supplies for commercial agriculture, or is it a result of factors such as the consolidation of land-ownership?

- 4.5.2 From the 17th to the 19th centuries Watling Street had a reputation for being very unsafe, especially at night, partly because there were relatively few inhabitants and buildings, the road climbed uphill, and it was closely bordered by thick woodland. Until the second quarter of the 19th century the preferred method of travel between London and Dover was usually by boat from the Pool of London or Tilbury to Rochester, picking up the Dover Road on the east side of the Medway only to cross Kent to the south-east. Did this social abandonment or relegation of the area operate in a self-perpetuating vicious circle?
- 4.5.3 All the potential contributions of the results of excavation of this site to the research aims above are of local, and no wider, importance.

5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This interim report was prepared by the site supervisor, Andrew Westman. The archaeological plans were digitised by Sarah Jones.

6 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Margary, I, 1955 *Roman roads in Britain*

URL , 1994 *Channel Tunnel Rail Link, Assessment of Historic and Cultural Effects, Final Report*, Oxford Archaeological Unit

URL, 1995 *Channel Tunnel Rail Link, Assessment of Historic and Cultural Effects, Supplementary Fieldwork Report*, Oxford Archaeological Unit

URL, 1998 *Agreement for the provision of archaeological investigations at Pepper Hill to the River Medway (package 381)*

APPENDIX 1 - ARCHIVE INDEX

ITEM	NUMBER OF ITEMS	NUMBER OF FRAGMENTS	CONDITION (No. of items) (W=washed; UW=unwashed; M=marked; P=processed; UP=unprocessed; D=digitised; I=indexed)
Contexts records	70		
A1 plans			
A4 plans	11		D
A1 sections			
A4 sections	15		
Small finds (boxes)			
Films (monochrome) S=slide; PR=print	1PR		
Films (Colour) S=slide; PR=print	1S, 3PR (+ second set)		
Flint (boxes)			
Pottery (boxes)			
Fired clay (boxes)			
CBM (boxes)			
Stone (boxes)			
Metalwork (boxes)			
Glass (boxes)			
Slag (boxes)			
Human Bone (boxes)			
Animal Bone (boxes)			
Soil Samples (No.)			
Soil Samples (bags/tubs)			
Soil Samples (Monolith/kubina tin)			

APPENDIX 2: INTERIM SUMMARY REPORT

As part of a larger programme of archaeological investigation along the route of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, Union Railways (South) Limited (URS) commissioned the Museum of London Archaeology Service (MoLAS) to undertake an archaeological excavation at Watling Street (site code ARC WS 98), Cobham Park, Kent, in 1998. The site had not been previously evaluated. The excavation concluded that a ditch and bank defined the grounds of the medieval and post-medieval estate of Cobham Hall, a ha-ha or park pale being built probably when a deer park was created *c* 1700.

The site comprised five trenches measuring up to some 50m by 10m positioned across a two surviving sections of ancient Watling Street at intervals along a 1km stretch of road. The road sloped down from west to east, the eastern end running through a hollow-way as much as 3m below current ground level. Part of the road had been repositioned during the widening and re-engineering of the 20th-century road, the A2, directly to the north.

The medieval and post-medieval bank and ditch that formed the northern limit of Cobham Park was sectioned at the western end of the 1km stretch of road. The bank was revetted with roughly coursed chalk blocks. The ditch was approximately 3m wide and had possibly been recut. In a second trench part of a brick structure was revealed, identified from documentary sources as dog kennels built when the grounds of Cobham Park were landscaped by Humphrey Repton *c* 1790.

APPENDIX 3: KENT SMR RECORD SHEET

Site Name: Watling Street, Area 330, Kent			
Site code: ARC WS 98			
Summary: Excavation of five trenches totalling 190 sq m at intervals along a 1km stretch of a modern road, Watling Street, Cobham, west of Rochester, Kent, in 1998, was commissioned by Union Railways (South) Limited and carried out by the Museum of London Archaeology Service.			
District: Gravesham		Parish: Cobham CP	
Period(s): 1. medieval 2. post-medieval			
NGR (to west and east extremes):		100 km ref: TQ	
NGR Easting 6805		NGR Northing 6960	
NGR Easting 6900		NGR Northing 6950	
Type of Recording:	Evaluation	Watching Brief	Field Walking
(Delete)	Excavation	Geophysical Survey	Measured Survey
Date of Recording: (From) 21 September 1998		(To) 9 October 1998	
Unit Undertaking Recording: Museum of London Archaeology Service, Walker House, 87 Queen Victoria Street, London EC4V 4AB			
Summary of Field Results: A post-medieval park pale or substantial ha-ha was found. Very scant remains of buildings were found, documented as dog kennels (later poultry yards) erected at the time of landscaping of Cobham Park by Humphrey Repton <i>c</i> 1790. There was no obvious sign of any road earlier than the existing road.			
Location of Archive/Finds:		MoLAS temporarily	
Bibliography: URL , 1994 <i>Channel Tunnel Rail Link, Assessment of Historic and Cultural Effects, Final Report</i> , Oxford Archaeological Unit URL, 1999 <i>Watling Street (ARC WS 98) Interim Report</i> , Museum of London Archaeology Service			
Summary Compiler: Andrew Westman			Date: 23 July 1999