

Archaeological Desktop Assessment  
Oaklea, Whitehall Lane, Buckhurst Hill

by

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## **Introduction**

This report constitutes the results of an archaeological desk top study of the Oaklea site(Fig. 1). The site is situated at Buckhurst Hill between Whitehall Lane and Tuttlebee Lane on the boundary of Woodford with Epping Forest, at grid reference TQ404938. This desktop study was a requirement of an archaeological condition attached to the planning consent for a proposed redevelopment, planning application number 0718/94 to the London Borough of Redbridge.

## **Geology and topography**

The site lies on London clay overlain by glacial gravels on the south-east side (Geological Survey Sheet 257 Romford (Drift Edition, 1974) 1:50000). The site slopes down from east to west to north-west.

## **Background history**

The site is located within the ancient parish of Woodford in the Becontree hundred. The area was probably part of the Manor of Woodford Hall and of the Abbey of Waltham Holy Cross and before that to Barking Abbey. Alternatively it may have been part of the manor of Monkams which was located immediately to the east of the site. This was not identified as a manor in medieval times. Monkams was granted to Stratford Langthorne abbey by William de Montfichet in 1135. The abbot of Waltham Holy Cross claimed jurisdiction over it in 1525, probably from his position as being lord of the

manor of Woodford. By 1630 claims were made by the owner of Buckhurst and by 1646 it was described as a farm. Near the site, some 500 meters to the South, was the old workhouse built in 1820, which was subsequently converted to a private residence. By 1889 it was redeveloped into Bancroft school.

The forest which this land was part of, is known as Epping Forest, but before 1660 was named Waltham Forest. This used to be a royal hunting forest. Besides hunting the forest was used to pasture pigs in.

The name Oaklea probably was taken from a late 18th century estate in the neighbourhood called the Oaks.

A review of the Greater London Sites and Monuments database did not produce any evidence of known archaeological remains within the vicinity of the site.

### **Road systems**

Woodford consisted of a series of small hamlets strung out along the High road. The site is situated to the west of Epping New Road and the High Road. The High Road existed as a track within the forest, leading from London to Epping Heath and was referred to in documents at least as early as AD 1341 (VCH 1973: 338). It is likely to have been considerably older however as is indicated by the presence of medieval farms of 13th century date along its route. It may indeed constitute a Roman road going from London to Dunmow.

Roads and tracks delineate space and tend to form boundaries. The fact that the site is situated to the west of the High Road therefore argues for it to have been

part of the manor of Woodford Hall rather than Monkams which is located to the east of this road.

### **Cartographic evidence**

The 1777 Chapman and Andre map only shows a forest cover on the site at this date (Fig. 2). On the 1868-1876 Ordnance Survey map no structures are visible at or near the position of the current Oaklea house (Fig. 3). The 1897 Ordnance Survey map shows a substantial building in the southwest corner of the site, roughly the same location as Oaklea house is now (Fig. 4). The footprint of this structure is somewhat similar to that of Oaklea house. The site itself seems likely to have been woodland until ca 1868-1876.

### **Conclusions**

The site is predominantly situated on London Clay. This type of geomorphological make-up generally does not favour primitive arable farming techniques common in prehistory. It is therefore less likely that the site will have been associated with cultural activities which required any degree of permanence on site.

The archival sources indicate that the site was part of a forest during the medieval and postmedieval periods, until sometime between 1868 and 1897 when the Oaklea house was built.

Considering this evidence it appears unlikely that a significant archaeological resource is present at this site, and the author would recommend that no further field evaluation will be required as a consequence of the present desktop study.

### **Bibliography**

Pugh, R.B. (Ed) 1973 The Victoria History of the County of Essex volume VI, University of London Institute of Historical Research, Oxford University Press

R.G. Ramsey and Fowkes R.L. 1986 Epping Forest then and now, Battle of Britain Prints International Limited.

Fowkes, R.L. 1981 Woodford then and now, Battle of Britain Prints International Limited.

### **Sources**

Greater London Sites and Monuments Record

Essex County Records Office

Guildhall Library

Public Records Office, Chancery Lane