Contents

An Archaeological Watching Brief at Whitehouse Farm, Ashby Road, Stapleton, Leicestershire. NGR: SP4350 9925

Summary

A watching brief was undertaken on the 20th of March 2006 for Mr and Mrs Burchell by the University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS). The purpose of the work was to observe the creation of a new site access to former agricultural buildings being converted to a domestic dwelling, planning application: 04/00817/COU. The site is situated in open fields approximately 1km north of the centre of Stapleton village. The Leicestershire and Rutland Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) showed that cropmarks in adjacent fields indicated the presence of prehistoric occupation which was likely to extend into the proposed development site. Because of this the works were seen as being likely to uncover and disturb any surviving archaeological deposits and features.

Creation of the new driveway required the removal of all topsoil and most subsoil in readiness for a stone surface. Between 0.3m and 0.46m of turf, topsoil and subsoil were removed to reveal an orange brown clay sand natural substrate. Areas of disturbance included a terracotta land drain, root disturbance from a hedgeline and a modern farmyard surface.

No archaeological deposits or features were observed during the course of the watching brief.

Records will be deposited with Historic and Natural Environment Services, Leicestershire County Council, Accession number XA.27.2006

1. Introduction

Stapleton lies within the parish of Peckleton in the district of Hinckley and Bosworth (SP 4350 9925) (fig. 1). The development site lies on relatively flat ground approximately 1km to the north of the village centre on the main A447 road heading north from Stapleton (figs 2 and 3). Prior to the work the site for the new access road was used for allotments and light agricultural use. For the last few years the land has been turfed with a hedge separating it from the adjacent farmyard.

The proposed development work is for the creation of a new access road from the A447 to the converted barn and yard buildings (plates 1 and 2). The initial groundworks involved the removal of topsoil and subsoil along the 30 metre length of the road in preparation for a stone and gravel surface.

In view of the potential for uncovering archaeological deposits it was necessary that there should be archaeological attendance during the work to ensure that any affected deposits were recognised and adequately recorded.

2. Geology and Topography

The Ordnance Survey Geological Survey of Great Britain Sheet 155 indicates that the geology of the area consists of Boulder Clay lying beneath seams of sand and gravel. The site is situated on a relatively level ground with extensive views in all directions. It has an average height of between 115 and 116 metres OD.

The site is situated on the western side of the A447 which appears to have been resurfaced a number of times with the result that it is now significantly higher than the surrounding ground level. Although the site was relatively level a small step in the ground surface could be seen 15 metres from the boundary with the road resulting in a drop of approximately 0.2 metres towards the farmyard on its west side (plate 3).

3. Archaeological and Historical Background

Place name evidence suggests that the formalised origins of Stapleton belong to the Anglo-Saxon era with the first documentary evidence coming from the Domesday Book. From that period until the early 20th century Stapleton has remained as a relatively small hamlet.

Recent archaeological evaluations north of St. Martin's churchyard and on Main Street in Stapleton have revealed archaeological evidence in the form of metalled surfaces, charcoal spreads and medieval property boundaries. Pottery finds from domestic refuse pits suggested activity from the 12th to 17th centuries with most activity taking place between the 13th and 14th centuries (ULAS reports 2001/7 and 2004/104). The SMR shows that cropmarks have been recorded which indicate the presence of an Iron Age rectangular enclosure and three round house (SMR Ref. 49NW X). As such settlements are know to drift in their location over time it was thought likely that such prehistoric activity may be revealed during this work. No previous archaeological work is known to have been undertaken within the area of this development.

4. Archaeological Objectives

The objectives of the watching brief were:

a. To identify the presence/absence of any archaeological deposits.
b. To establish the character, extent, date range and significance of any archaeological deposits affected by the proposed ground works.
c. To excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the ground works.
d. To produce an archive and report of any results.

5. Methodology

The topsoil and subsoil strip covering the entire length of the proposed access road used a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. All topsoil and subsoil was removed in spits and moved from the vicinity in order to create a level base in preparation for the stone and gravel surface. The exposed natural substratum

was inspected for any archaeological features or deposits and the spoil checked for unstratified finds.

All deposits were recorded by notes and sketches using the standard ULAS pro-forma watching brief form. Digital colour photographs were also taken throughout the work.

All work followed the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) Code of Conduct and adhered to their *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs.*

6. Results

The topsoil consisted of mid grey brown sandy loam with small roots throughout with an average depth of around 0.2m whilst the subsoil was an orange brown sandy silt with a small amount of clay and having an average depth of around 0.15m. Removal of these two layers revealed the natural substrate consisting of a mid orange brown clay sand with frequent subrounded pebbles. All spoil was examined for artefacts and a small quantity of very late 19th and early 20th century pottery sherds were recovered but not retained.

Cutting through the step, mentioned in Section 2 above, showed it to be formed from a thicker band of topsoil with no corresponding changes in either the subsoil or natural which continues to be quite level and even. As this step was around a tree it is possible that the allotment work and possible ploughing has created a small lynchet type feature in the recent past. At this point, which was 15 metres from the boundary with the A447, the topsoil depth was 0.32m whilst the subsoil was 0.16m deep.

There appeared to be a significant amount of root damage along the length of the access with root activity increasing towards the farmyard. Twenty seven and a half metres from the A447 boundary was a recently taken out hedgeline which showed as a line of irregular disturbance and two rectangular fence post holes with the wood still in-situ. A round section terracotta land drain was noted running into the hedgeline from the north east.

West of the removed hedgeline a thin, 0.5m, layer of turf covered a thick layer of broken stone and mill waste. This was apparently part of the farmyard which had been turfed in the last few years as the farm contracted. As the new road is intended for light traffic only it was decided that this firmly bedded layer would make a suitable base and could be left in place so that only a gravel top dressing would be required. Any archaeological deposits would therefore be preserved underneath.

7. Discussion

Despite the high potential no archaeological deposits or features were encountered during the watching brief. Although cropmark evidence indicates the presence of prehistoric activity in the vicinity of the development either little happened here or the remains were so ephemeral that none has survived. The modern pottery sherds

seen during the topsoil strip probably relate to allotment activity or rubbish disposal from the nearby farmhouse.

8. Archive

The archive consists of site notes and digital photographs to be held by Leicestershire County Council, Historic and Natural Environment Team under accession number XA.27.2006

9. Publication

A summary of the work will be submitted for publication in the *Transactions of The Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* in due course.

10. Acknowledgements

The watching brief fieldwork was undertaken by A R Hyam. The project was managed by R Buckley.

Andrew Hyam
March 2006
University of Leicester Archaeological Services
University of Leicester
University Road, Leicester, LE1 7RH Tel; (0116) 2522848 Fax: (0116) 2522614

Appendix. Figures and Plates

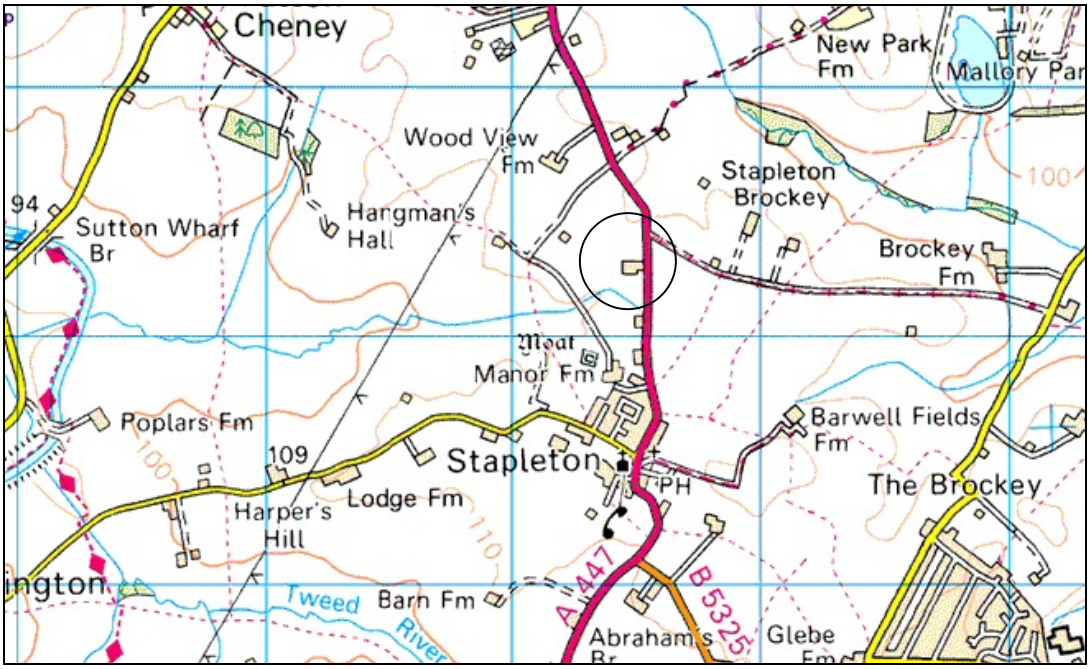

Figure 1: Site location plan (circled).

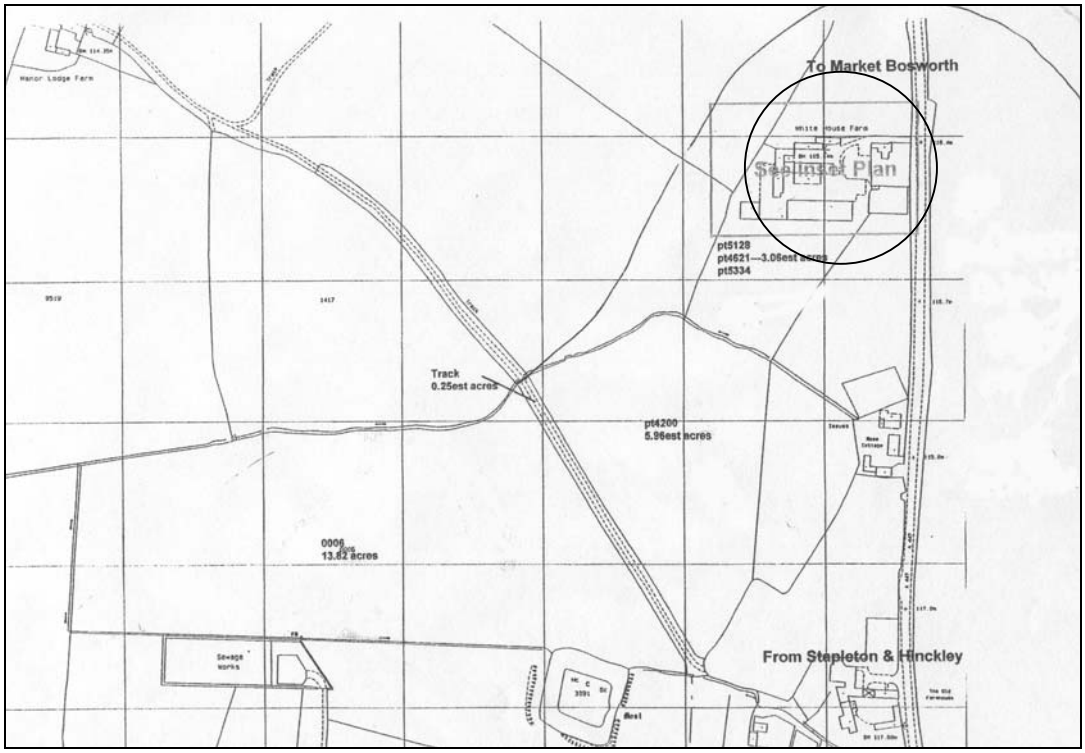

Fig. 2: Area of proposed development.
Source: Fox Bennet/ D Burchell

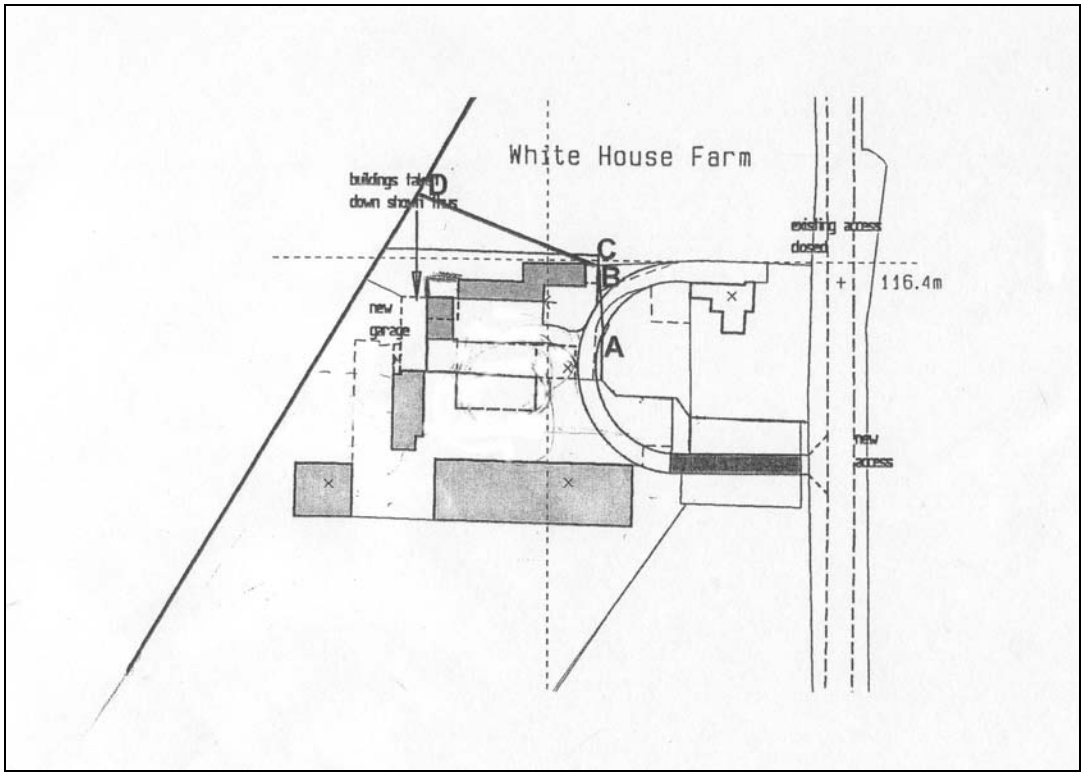

Figure 3: Development area showing access from road.
Source: Fox Bennet/D Burchell

Plate 1. Development site viewed from Ashby Road.

Plate 2. Site viewed from farmyard towards Ashby Road.

Plate 3.Step in topsoil along length of access road. Viewed from south.