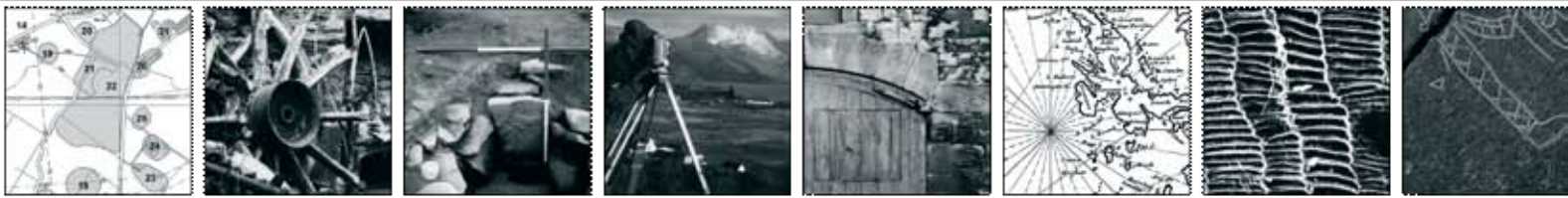


RGPC13/01



# THE RECREATION GROUND, PARK CRESCENT, STEWARTBY

*Archaeological Evaluation*

*commissioned by O&H Properties*

12/01727/MAF

October 2013



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HA Job no.: RGPC13/01  
NGR: TL 020 424  
Parish: Stewartby  
Local authority: Bedford Borough Council  
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Recreation Ground  
Park Crescent  
Stewartby  
Bedfordshire



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100013329

scale 1:2,500 @ A4



### Illus 1

Site location



# THE RECREATION GROUND, PARK CRESCENT, STEWARTBY

## *Archaeological Evaluation*

*Headland Archaeology conducted an evaluation at a proposed development site at The Recreation Ground, Park Crescent, Stewartby, Bedfordshire in order to provide further information on the archaeological potential of the site. The work was commissioned by O&H Properties. A total of twenty trenches were excavated over the Development Area (DA) which revealed limited archaeological remains comprising ditches and a pit of late Iron Age date as well as modern drainage features. The Iron Age features contained abraded pottery and animal bone and their location and distribution indicates they are likely to represent the remains of field systems on the periphery of more concentrated activity located outside the DA. These remains are considered to be of local significance.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Planning background**

O&H Properties Ltd have been granted outline planning permission (Application No. 2/01727/MAF) to improve and upgrade the community and recreational facilities at the Recreation Ground, Park Crescent, Stewartby, Bedfordshire. This land is henceforth referred to as the Development Area (DA).

Bedford Borough Council's Archaeological Officer (AO) advised that the area covered by the DA is archaeologically sensitive and, therefore requested that an archaeological evaluation be carried out to assess the impact of the proposals on potential sub-surface heritage assets. This request is in accordance with current National Planning Policy.

O&H Properties Ltd commissioned Headland Archaeology to prepare a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for the evaluation, undertake the fieldwork and prepare a report (this document) on the results. The WSI (Headland Archaeology 2013) conformed to the outline contained in Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment: The MoRPHE Project Managers' Guide (2006) and was submitted to Bedford Borough Council's AO for approval prior to the commencement of works.

### **1.2 Site location and background**

The DA is located in the north-west of Stewartby; enclosed by Broadmead Road, Park Crescent and Stewartby Way. The site is centred on TL 020 424 and lies at a height of between 35–39m AOD. The DA comprises c. 5ha of land. Current land use is as a recreational area with some areas of rough grass. The land parcel also houses the Stewartby Bowling Club ground which was not subject to evaluation.

The geology of the area is identified as Oxford Clay (Mudstone) with superficial alluvial deposits of sand, silt, clay and gravels over the south-eastern corner of the DA (<http://www.bgs.ac.uk>).

### **1.3 Archaeological background**

A search carried out of the Historic Environment Record (HER) revealed few records for other sites in the Stewartby area. Sites recorded include cropmarks of a rectangular enclosure and possible trackway (HER9603), c. 1km north of the DA as well as the settlement and moated medieval site of Wootton Broadmead (HER8293, 8294 and 17039) all approximately 300–400m north of the DA. Further medieval remains are known to have existed in the area including a second moated site (HER 3431) approximately 400m south of the DA, now destroyed by clay extraction. The deserted medieval village of Wootton Pillinge (HER 8292) was also located less than 200m west of the DA but this has also been destroyed by the later Brickworks.

Little was known about the archaeology of Stewartby until relatively recently. This is largely due to the absence of archaeological investigation, despite the fact that extensive quarrying and brickmaking industry had been active in the area for the past 150 years. Recent archaeological investigations in the Stewartby area and surrounding area have indicated that the Marston Vale is rich in archaeological remains.

Archaeological remains of significance were recently discovered at Marston Park, 2.5km to the south west of the DA. These comprised the remains of a late Iron Age / early Roman farmstead and part of an Anglo-Saxon settlement (Albion Archaeology report in prep). Trial trench investigation immediately to the south of Stewartby and subsequent excavation also revealed remains of a small settlement dating to the late Iron Age (Albion Archaeology 2010).

Most other HER records for the immediate area refer to sites associated with the adjacent brickworks. The clay workings themselves (HER

6681) are an important industrial heritage asset both nationally and locally to communities in Bedford and the Marston Vale. The pits represent significant remains of a vast brickmaking industry which originated during the latter half of the 19th century. By the late 1930s they were the largest in the world, producing 500 million bricks per year and employing 2000 people.

Mapping from the late 19th century shows that during this time the DA was part of a large collection of fields in the area now occupied by Stewartby. During the early 20th century the area in which the DA is located was first used as a recreation ground.

Prior to these investigations, Iron Age and Roman settlement remains/field systems and medieval ridge and furrow cultivation were considered the most likely remains to be present within the DA.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Objectives

In general the objectives of the evaluation are presented in the WSI (Headland Archaeology 2013, Section 4).

The specific objectives of the evaluation were:

- To ascertain the extent, depth below ground surface, depth of deposit, character, date, significance and condition of any archaeological remains on site;
- To establish the extent to which previous development and/or other processes have affected archaeological deposits at the site; and
- To establish the likely impact on archaeological deposits of the proposed development.

### 2.2 Methodology

Fieldwork took place between the 10th September and 18th September 2013. Twenty trenches 50m in length and 2m in width were excavated (Illus 1). Trenches were laid out in order to determine the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the DA.

The trenches were opened down to the top of the natural geology whereupon archaeological features were hand excavated.

### 2.3 Recording

All recording was in accordance with the code of practice of the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA). All trenches and contexts were given unique numbers and all recording was undertaken on pro forma record cards that conform to accepted archaeological standards. All stratigraphic relationships were recorded.

An overall site plan at an appropriate scale and relative to the National Grid was recorded by digital survey using a differential GPS.

A full photographic record comprising colour slide and black and white print photographs was taken, supplemented with digital

photography. A metric scale was clearly visible in record photographs of contexts.

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 Introduction

Full trench descriptions, including orientation, length and depth of overburden are presented in Appendix 1.1. Technical details of individual contexts are presented in Appendix 1.2. Context numbers are expressed according to the trench in which they were found; i.e. Trench 1 – [100], [101]; Trench 2, [200], [201] etc. Cut features are shown as [100] and the deposits within them are expressed as (102).

In general the site stratigraphy comprised approximately 0.5m of overburden comprising between 0.1m and 0.25m of topsoil overlying between 0.3m and 0.4m of subsoil. The relatively thin topsoil is likely to have been a result of landscaping for the creation of the extant recreation ground. The subsoil is likely to represent an historic plough horizon, pre-dating the creation of the recreation ground. Beneath these deposits was the natural clay geology. The majority of the DA was devoid of archaeological features and no evidence of medieval or post-medieval ridge and furrow cultivation was present. Indeed, the general paucity of remains indicates that historic activity within the DA is very limited.

#### 3.1.1 Late Iron Age

Two ditches [202] and [702] aligned broadly E-W and NW-SE respectively and a single pit [802] were revealed in the northern and central parts of the DA (Illus 2). The features were shallow with single fills. They were directly overlain by a clearly-defined subsoil which demonstrates they have been truncated. Deposits with the features were of a similar silty clay matrix containing poorly sorted stones and abraded late Iron Age pottery sherds (and in the case of [203] animal bone). These are consistent with deliberate backfilling of naturally derived material.

The morphology and layout of the ditches indicates they form part of an enclosure system or field boundaries, however the function of the pit is uncertain. The presence of late Iron Age pottery within their fills suggest some form of domestic activity was taking place in the vicinity. However, the abraded nature of the pottery and bone, as well as the limited size and spatial coverage of the features suggests they represent sparse and/or heavily truncated activity on the periphery of more concentrated remains outside the DA.

#### 3.1.2 Post-medieval

The remains of a sub-rectangular feature were revealed at the N-W end of Trench 5. On investigation it was shown to contain fragments of CBM and 17th century earthenware and is likely to represent the remains of a pit. Its location within what would have been fields in the post-medieval period suggests it may be related to agricultural activity. However, it is also broadly located near to the NW corner of the allotments as shown on the 1925 3rd edition Ordnance Survey map and may be associated with their creation and/or use.



**Key**

- site boundary
- trenches
- Iron Age/Roman features
- natural features
- modern features
- undated features
- land drains

0 50m  
 N  
 scale 1:1,250 @ A3

**Illus 2**  
 Site plan and detail of Trench 2, 7 & 8



### 3.1.3 Modern

A total of three shallow gullies were identified in the central and western parts of the DA; [804], [902] and [1002]. The latter two followed the layout of the land drains on NE-SW and NW-SE alignments respectively, whereas [804] was aligned broadly N-S. Following investigation, these were shown to contain ceramic drainage pipes and are likely to represent precursors to the more comprehensive land-drains discussed below.

The majority of trenches contained ceramic land-drains which criss-cross the site on various alignments (Illus 2). Within the western and northern parts of the DA, these predominantly aligned NE-SW, whilst in the south eastern part of the DA, they are aligned N-S. This difference indicates that this part of the DA was within a different field at the time of the laying of the drains. Indeed, the 3rd edition Ordnance Survey map of 1925 shows the SE part of the as being a separate field marked 'allotment gardens'. This division is not visible on the 1901 2nd edition or 1883 1st edition maps suggesting the creation of the allotments post-dates 1901. Furthermore, the 3" bore circular land-drains used across the DA are consistent with an early 20th century date.

## 3.2 Description of the significance of the heritage assets

Archaeological remains identified within the DA have been assessed in relation to the following research agendas. These comprise: Research and Archaeology: Resource Assessment, Research Agenda and Strategy (Oake et al 2007). These are supported by Research and Archaeology Revisited: a Revised Framework for the East of England, East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Paper 24 (Medlycott, M. 2011, ed.); Research and Archaeology; A Framework for the Eastern Counties (Glazebrook 1997; Brown & Glazebrook 2000), Exploring Our Past (English Heritage 1991), and English Heritage Archaeology Division Research Agenda (English Heritage 1997).

Post-medieval and modern remains identified within the DA are considered to be of negligible significance. However, the Iron Age remains identified within the DA (ditches [202], [702] and pit [804]) are considered to represent a heritage asset. Of relevance to the remains identified within the DA are broad topics derived from the local and regional research agendas:

*'The establishment of regional pottery sequences' and 'The investigation of datable pottery assemblages'* (Brown and Glazebrook 2000, 17).

*'The role and function of late Iron Age settlement'* (Medleycott 2011, 31).

Understanding late Iron Age pottery assemblages and the appearance in Bedfordshire of 'Belgic' style pottery in the 1st century BC (Oake et al 2007, 65).

The relative paucity of features and the limited animal bone and pottery assemblages offer limited potential to address the research topics

indicated above. Their value lies in their comparative potential to other contemporary remains within the Stewartby area and Marston Vale. They are considered to be of local significance.

## 3.3 Finds assessment

By Jackie Wells

The finds assemblage numbered 16 sherds of pottery, 1 piece of slate, 12g of mortar and 7g of brick fragments. The finds are quantified by trench in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Quantification of finds by context, with spot dating*

Context	Pottery (PH)	Pottery (PM)	Building materials	CBM	Dating
203	12	–	–	–	Late Iron Age
503	–	1	19g	4g	17th century
703	4	–	–	–	Late Iron Age
803	1	–	–	–	Late Iron Age
Total	17	1	19g	4g	–

### 3.3.1 Pottery

Seventeen pottery sherds, representing 12 vessels (86g), were recovered from four features (Table 1). Sherds are fragmentary, with an average weight of 5g, and all are abraded. No diagnostic forms occur. Fabrics types are identified in accordance with the Bedfordshire Ceramic Type Series. With the exception of a 17th century sherd from deposit (503), all are datable to the late 'pre-Belgic' Iron Age.

### 3.3.2 Other finds

Other finds include some CBM and building material from deposit (503). It is probable these are contemporary with the 17th century pottery from this context.

**Table 2**

*Finds catalogue*

Context	Material	Object	Qty	Weight (g)	Description	Fabric	Period	Spot date
203	Pottery (PH)	Coarseware	6	53	Four vessels (body sherds).	F03 – Grog and sand	PH	LIA
203	Pottery (PH)	Coarseware	6	16	Three vessels (body sherds)	F17 – Grog	PH	LIA
502	Pottery (PM)	Earthenware	1	1	Body sherd	P03 – Black-glazed earthenware	PM	17th C
502	Building material	Slate	1	7	Small fragment of slate	–	–	–
502	Building material	Mortar	1	12	Small fragment of mortar	–	–	–
502	CBM	Brick	4	92	Fragments of brick	–	–	–
703	Pottery (PH)	Coarseware	3	15	Body sherds	F17 – Grog	PH	LIA
703	Pottery (PH)	Coarseware	1	1	Abraded crumb	F03 – Grog and sand	PH	LIA

### 3.3.3 Conclusions

The small sherd size and abraded nature of the assemblage is consistent with the pot being re-worked prior to deposition within the features. It is possible they represent some form of domestic refuse. Indeed, fill (203) contained animal bone, however the poor preservation of the assemblage and general paucity of features indicates they represent low-level activity on the periphery of a larger concentration outside the DA. Their potential to contribute to our understanding of Iron Age activity in the locality is limited.

## 3.4 Animal bone assessment

By Laura Bailey

The animal bone assemblage comprised 11 fragments weighing 8g from deposit (203) of ditch [202]. The bone recovered from deposit (203) was extremely fragmentary and was not suitable for identification. Three of the fragments appear to have been partially cremated or burned, indicating they are domestic in origin. Because of the limited and fragmentary nature of the assemblage, its potential to contribute to our understanding of the local Iron Age economy is negligible.

## 4 DISCUSSION

Trial trenching revealed limited archaeological remains from the late Iron Age, post-medieval and modern periods.

Post-medieval and modern remains comprise drainage gullies and land-drains related to the agricultural use of the site in the 19th and 20th centuries. Although one of the pits identified contained limited 17th century pottery, its location indicates it was associated with allotments shown on early 20th century mapping. Therefore it is considered unlikely that it represents true post-medieval activity.

Late Iron Age remains comprise two ditches and a single pit located in the northern and central parts of the DA. They contained fragmentary, abraded pottery and animal bone indicating possible domestic activity and their deposits showed no evidence of charcoal or organic content. Furthermore, the remains are shallow and have undergone truncation through ploughing in the modern era, prior to the creation of the recreation ground. The paucity of and layout of the features suggest they represent the truncated remains of field-systems, whilst the limited presence of pottery and bone indicates they are within the vicinity of more concentrated contemporary activity outside the DA.

### 4.1 Conclusions

Late Iron Age remains identified within the DA form part of a wider landscape of Iron Age settlement activity surrounding Stewartby and the Martson Vale. Their value lies in their juxtaposition to and comparative potential with similar contemporary sites within this wider area. However, their intrinsic value is very limited and they are considered to be of local significance. The DA is unlikely to contain, additional more significant remains and it is considered that further work would contribute little to our understanding of the Iron Age in this part of Bedfordshire.

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**Illus 3** ▶  
*Ditch [202] facing ENE*



**Illus 4** ▶  
*Ditch [702] facing SE*



**Illus 5** ▶  
*Pit [802] facing SW*





◀ **Illus 6**  
*Trench 3 facing NW*



◀ **Illus 7**  
*Trench 12 facing SW*



**Illus 8** ▶  
*Trench 16 facing NE*



**Illus 9** ▶  
*Trench 20 facing NW*



## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1 Site registers

#### Appendix 1.1 Trench register

Trench	Orientation	Length (m)	Description	Min depth to archaeology (m)
1	NW-SE	48	0–0.2m topsoil; 0.2–0.5m subsoil; 0.5m+ natural geology	0.5
2	N-S	50	0–0.1m topsoil; 0.1–0.45m subsoil; 0.45m+ natural geology	0.45
3	NW-SE	50	0–0.2m topsoil; 0.2–0.5m subsoil; 0.5m+ natural geology	0.5
4	NE-SW	50	0–0.15m topsoil; 0.15–0.5m subsoil; 0.5m+ natural geology	0.5
5	NW-SE	50	0–0.15m topsoil; 0.15–0.5m subsoil; 0.5m+ natural geology	0.5
6	NE-SW	50	0–0.15m topsoil; 0.15–0.45m subsoil; 0.45m+ natural geology	0.5
7	NE-SW	50	0–0.3m topsoil; 0–0.5m subsoil; 0.5m+ natural geology	0.5
8	NE-SW	50	0–0.2m topsoil; 0.2–0.55m subsoil; 0.55m+ natural geology	0.55
9	NW-SE	50	0–0.15m topsoil; 0.15–0.55m subsoil; 0.55m+ natural geology	0.55
10	NE-SW	50	0–0.2m topsoil; 0.2–0.55m subsoil; 0.55m+ natural geology	0.55
11	NW-SE	50	0–0.2m topsoil; 0.2–0.6m subsoil; 0.6m+ natural geology	0.6
12	NE-SW	50	0–0.2m topsoil; 0.2–0.55m subsoil; 0.55m+ natural geology	0.55
13	NW-SE	50	0–0.2m topsoil; 0.2–0.55m subsoil; 0.55m+ natural geology	0.55
14	NE-SW	50	0–0.2m topsoil; 0.2–0.55m subsoil; 0.55m+ natural geology	0.55
15	NW-SE	50	0–0.25m topsoil; 0.25–0.45m subsoil; 0.45m+ natural geology	0.45

Trench	Orientation	Length (m)	Description	Min depth to archaeology (m)
16	NE-SW	50	0–0.25m topsoil; 0.25–0.45m subsoil; 0.45m+ natural geology	0.45
17	NW-SE	50	0–0.25m topsoil; 0.25–0.45m subsoil; 0.45m+ natural geology	0.45
18	NE-SW	50	0–0.15m topsoil; 0.15–0.5m subsoil; 0.5m+ natural geology	0.5
19	NE-SW	50	0–0.2m topsoil; 0.2–0.6m subsoil; 0.6m+ natural geology	0.6
20	NW-SE	50	0–0.15m topsoil; 0.15–0.5m subsoil; 0.5m+ natural geology	0.5

#### Appendix 1.2 Context register

Context	Area	Description
101	Tr1	Cut of natural feature
102	Tr1	Fill of [101]
103	Tr1	Cut of natural feature
104	Tr1	Fill of [103]
202	Tr2	Cut of gully, 0.87m wide, 0.27m deep
203	Tr2	Fill of [202], mid yellow-brown silty clay
502	Tr5	Cut of modern pit
503	Tr5	Fill of modern pit
702	Tr7	Cut of ditch, 1.16m wide, 0.36m deep
703	Tr7	Fill of [702], mid grey-brown silty clay
802	Tr8	Cut of pit, 0.7m wide, 0.33m deep
803	Tr8	Fill of [802], mid yellow-brown silty clay
902	Tr9	Modern ditch
1002	Tr10	Modern ditch
1202	Tr12	Cut of tree bowl
1203	Tr12	Fill of 1202

#### Appendix 1.3 Photographic register

Photo	Facing	Description
001	ENE	WSW facing section through gully [202]
002	NE	SW facing section through natural feature [102]
003	E	W facing section through natural feature [104]
004	N	Trench 2

Photo	Facing	Description
005	SE	NW facing section through ditch [702]
006	SW	Trench 7
007	SE	Trench 5
008	SW	NE facing section through pit [802]
009	NE	Pipe in Trench 8
010	NE	Pipe in Trench 8 – overhead shot
011	SW	Trench 8
012	SE	Tree bowl [1202]
013	SW	Trench 1
014	SW	Trench 1
015	–	RGPC13 ID shot (spray paint FD)
016	NW	Trench 2
017	NW	Trench 2
018	NW	Trench 3
019	NW	Trench 3
020	NE	Trench 4
021	NE	Trench 4
022	SW	Trench 6
023	SW	Trench 6
024	SE	Trench 5
025	SE	Trench 5
026	NW	Trench 9
027	NW	Trench 9
028	NE	Trench 7
029	NE	Trench 7
030	NE	Trench 10
031	NE	Trench 10
032	NW	Trench 11
033	NW	Trench 11
034	SW	Trench 12
035	SW	Trench 12
036	SW	Trench 8
037	SW	Trench 8
038	NW	Trench 19
039	NW	Trench 19
040	NW	Trench 20
041	NW	Trench 20
042	SW	Trench 18

Photo	Facing	Description
043	SW	Trench 18
044	NW	Trench 13
045	NW	Trench 13
046	NE	Trench 14
047	NW	Trench 17
048	NE	Trench 16
049	SE	Trench 15
050	NW	Backfilled Trench 1
051	S	Backfilled Trench 2
052	NW	Backfilled Trench 3
053	SW	Backfilled Trench 4
054	NW	Backfilled Trench 5
055	NE	Backfilled Trench 6
056	NE	Backfilled Trench 7







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