

**RAF HIGH WYCOMBE,
BRADENHAM, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

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Non Technical Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned, in July 2004, by WSP Environmental on behalf of Defence Estates, to undertake an archaeological evaluation comprising four trenches at RAF High Wycombe, Bradenham, Buckinghamshire centred on NGR 483390/197974.

The current land use of the Site comprises asphalt carparking associated with extant mess facilities to the north.

The Site lay adjacent to Grims Ditch, a late prehistoric earthwork and scheduled monument, though the proposed development and evaluation trenches lay outside the scheduled area.

The evaluation was undertaken between 16th and 18th August 2004. No archaeological features were encountered.

Acknowledgements

Wessex Archaeology would like to thank Alan Thomas and John Law of WSP Environmental and Frances Davies of Defence Estates for commissioning the project.

Thanks are also due to David Radford, the Archaeological Officer for Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service for monitoring the work on behalf of Buckinghamshire County Council and Flying Officer Debbie Moran for her support during the course of the project.

Mike Dinwiddy and Clare Davies undertook the fieldwork. The report was prepared by Reuben Thorpe, Mark Roughly produced the illustrations. The project was managed by Reuben Thorpe on behalf of Wessex Archaeology.

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1.1 WPS Environmental Ltd, commissioned Wessex Archaeology to undertake an intrusive archaeological evaluation within '2 Site' of RAF High Wycombe, Bradenham, Buckinghamshire. (**Figure 1**), centred on NGR 483390/197974.
- 1.1.2 The evaluation was undertaken in fulfilment of a planning condition placed on planning application, (04/6338) for the construction of temporary mess facilities.
- 1.1.3 The site of the proposed construction lies adjacent to Grims Ditch, a Scheduled Monument, though the proposed development itself lay outside the scheduled area.
- 1.1.4 As the proposed development lies adjacent to a nationally significant archaeological monument, David Radford, the Archaeological Officer (AO) of Buckinghamshire County Archaeology Service (BCAS), recommended that an intrusive archaeological evaluation be undertaken prior to determination of application.
- 1.1.5 The archaeological evaluation comprised trial trenching of 40 linear metres of 1.8m wide trench (72m²) within the footprint of the proposed development. (Figure 2)

2 SITE DESCRIPTION

- 2.1.1 RAF High Wycombe lies immediately to the west of the village of Walters Ash in the parish of Bradenham (Figure 1). The site of the proposed development covers an area of some 1,440m² and is adjacent to and immediately to the east of the route of Grims Ditch as it passes from north to south through the base, along the ridge at the south of the Chiltern Hills.
- 2.1.2 The Site lies at around 192m above Ordnance Datum (aOD), situated on the southern extent of the chalk ridge of the Chilterns and overlooks High Wycombe to the south.
- 2.1.3 Current land-use of the Site consists of an asphalt surface used to create car parking facilities associated with an extant officer's mess to the north.
- 2.1.4 The underlying geology of the Site comprises clay with flints overlying a solid geology of Cretaceous chalk.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1.1 The proposed development is to be situated next to Grims Ditch, an earth fast ditch and bank dating to later pre-history, possibly the pre-Roman Iron Age. Grims Ditch itself stretches from a point some 282m southeast of the Site, in discontinuous segments, to Berkhamstead and Ivinghoe.
- 3.1.2 The line of Grims Ditch has been extensively surveyed but has been subject to a limited number of intrusive investigations.
- 3.1.3 Dating the construction and disuse of Grims Ditch has been problematic due to a scarcity of dating evidence.
- 3.1.4 No previous intrusive archaeological interventions have been undertaken along the line of or adjacent to Grims Ditch within RAF High Wycombe.

4 PROJECT AIMS

- 4.1.1 The aims of the intrusive evaluation were to:
- Characterise the nature, date, extent and state of preservation of underlying archaeological deposits.
 - Identify the depth of burial (and thus the depth of sensitivity) of any underlying archaeological deposits or features.
 - Retrieve stratified assemblages of finds and ecofacts where/if present or preserved.
 - Establish the nature, date, form and function of any archaeological features and the nature of their relationships with Grims Ditch.

5 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

5.1 Health and Safety

- 5.1.1 All works were carried out in accordance with the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety regulations 1992 and all other relevant Health and Safety legislation and regulations and codes of practice in force at the time.

5.2 Fieldwork

- 5.2.1 All works were conducted in accordance with the guidance and standards outlined the Institute of Field Archaeologists' Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations (as amended 1994).

- 5.2.2 The evaluation comprised four machine-excavated trenches, sited within the footprint of the proposed development in locations agreed with the AO (Figure 2).
- 5.2.3 The evaluation trenches were excavated to archaeological/geological levels using a 180-degree wheeled machine, equipped with toothless ditching buckets under constant archaeological supervision.
- 5.2.4 All suspected archaeological features revealed were investigated by hand and recorded on Wessex Archaeology pre-printed recording sheets. A photographic record consisting of monochrome print, 35mm colour transparencies and digital images was also compiled.
- 5.2.5 A digital survey, linked to the Ordnance Survey National Grid, was made of the trenches.
- 5.2.6 All the trenches were backfilled following inspection and certification of the completion of works by the Archaeological Officer for Buckinghamshire County Archaeology Service.

6 RESULTS

- 6.1.1 Of the four trenches excavated none revealed archaeological deposits, features, or structures of any kind.
- 6.1.2 The typical stratigraphic sequence (Figure 2) across the Site comprised deposits of asphalt and hardcore over a horizon of truncation which represented the depth to which topsoil and subsoil had been removed prior to the construction of the carpark to a depth of 0.34 – 0.49m below ground level. Trench description tables are contained within **Appendix 1**.
- 6.1.3 The underlying geology consisted of mid orange and yellow clay with flints, with occasional peri-glacial water channels marbling its upper interface.

7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1.1 The evaluation revealed the absence of archaeological deposits and structures within the excavated trenches.
- 7.1.2 Though the Site has suffered substantial horizontal truncation, through the removal of topsoil and subsoil during the construction of the car park that currently occupies the site, even relatively shallow archaeological cut features, if present, should still have been preserved. Their absence from the evaluation trenches is interpreted therefore as being indicative of the absence of any density of past human cultural activity within the development area, rather than it having been removed by later truncation.

8 ARCHIVE AND ARCHIVE LOCATION

- 8.1.1 The archive, consisting of x1 A4 folder containing 4no trench record sheets, 3no Section drawing Sheets, 1no drawing index sheet, 3no photographic record sheets is located, for the time being, at the Offices of Wessex Archaeology in Salisbury. This archive will be deposited with Buckinghamshire Museums service in due course.

9 APPENDIX 1. TRENCH SUMMARY TABLES

Trench 1		
10m x 1.8m, 0.84m deep.		
<i>Ctext</i>	<i>Description</i>	Depth Below Ground
101	Natural. Orange clay with occasional flint inclusions	0.64 – 0.78m
102	Re-worked and truncated natural. Dirty, Greyish brown clay	0.49 – 0.63m
103	Levelling up, car park foundation. Abundant poorly sorted large flint nodules in brownish black clay matrix.	0.26 – 0.48m
104	Hardcore. Poorly sorted gravel in a matrix of gritty sand.	0.20 – 0.25m
105	Hardcore. Gravel and sand	80mm – 0.19m
106	Asphalt	0-7mm

Trench 2		
10m x 1.8m x 0.97m deep		
<i>Ctext</i>	<i>Description</i>	Depth Below Ground
201	Asphalt	0-7mm
202	Hardcore. Gravel and sand	8mm – 0.24m
203	Hardcore. Poorly sorted gravel in a matrix of gritty sand.	0.25 – 0.31m
204	Levelling up, car park foundation. Abundant poorly sorted large flint nodules in brownish black clay matrix.	0.32 – 0.53m
205	Re-worked and truncated natural. Dirty, Greyish brown clay	0.54 – 0.63m
206	Natural. Orange clay with occasional flint inclusions	0.64 – 0.78m

Trench 3		
7.90m x 1.8m x 0.88m deep		
<i>Ctext</i>	<i>Description</i>	Depth Below Ground
301	Asphalt	0 – 70mm
302	Hardcore. Gravel and sand	80mm – 0.25m
303	Hardcore. Poorly sorted gravel in a matrix of gritty sand. Also contains broken brick rubble demolition material from pad building built in 1982.	0.26 – 0.34m
304	Levelling up, car park foundation. Abundant poorly sorted large flint nodules in brownish black clay matrix with rubble and building debris.	0.35 – 0.46m
305	Re-worked and truncated natural. Dirty, Greyish brown clay with occasional flint nodules	0.47 – 0.67m
306	Natural. Orange clay with occasional flint inclusions	0.68-0.74m

Trench 4		
10m x 1.8m x 80m deep		
<i>Ctext</i>	<i>Description</i>	Depth Below Ground
401	Asphalt	0 – 70mm
402	Pale brown and dark yellow sandy gravels, 50% medium sand, 50% poorly sorted flint gravels.	80mm – 0.12m
403	Broken concrete in matrix of re-deposited asphalt	0.13 – 0.22m
404	Hardcore. Gravel and sand	0.23 – 0.35m
405	Re-worked and truncated natural. Dirty, Greyish brown clay with occasional flint nodules	0.36 – 0.57m
406	Natural. Orange clay with occasional flint inclusions	0.58 – 0.63m