



PDE, Silverstone Buckinghamshire

Archaeological Evaluation Report



**PDE, Silverstone,
Buckinghamshire**

Archaeological Evaluation Report

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Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Bond Davidson Ltd, acting for Porsche Cars Great Britain Ltd, to undertake an archaeological evaluation in advance of the re-use of the existing tarmac surface in connection with the adjacent Porsche Driving Experience track, on land at the rear of Becketts' Grandstand, Silverstone Motor Racing Circuit, Buckinghamshire NGR 468190 241880.

The fieldwork was undertaken between 6th and 13th August 2007.

The Site lies in close proximity to the site of the medieval chapel of St Thomas a Beckett. The chapel was apparently founded in the 13th century and given to the nearby Luffield Priory shortly thereafter. After the Dissolution it was converted into two dwellings, it was partially rebuilt in the 17th century and was demolished in 1943 to make way for Silverstone airfield. A gravestone discovered in 1732 is the only indication of an associated cemetery, although an adjacent 'close' could have contained a cemetery or associated domestic occupation. The chapel lay within the small and now deserted hamlet of Chapel Green, recorded on old maps of the county, a part of a dispersed medieval settlement pattern observed in the Whittlewood area. The Buckinghamshire County GIS indicates that the chapel was centred at 468175 241902.

The evaluation consisted of 4 machine excavated trenches, each measuring 30m by 1.6m. A 4m wide feature was exposed in each of the three northernmost trenches – those nearest to the believed position of the former chapel. Fills on the northern edges of these features contained building rubble, including glazed ridge tiles, plain floor tiles and limestone fragments, suggesting that the position of the chapel has been accurately transcribed. The features had filled up by the early 18th century and topsoil then formed over them. A 4m wide and c. 1m deep north-east to south-west ditch or canalised stream was present in Trenches 2 and 3 and a ditch with similar dimensions and orientation but 7m to the north-west was in Trench 1.

No graves were exposed and no remains associated with Chapel Green were revealed in the course of the evaluation.

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Acknowledgements

Wessex Archaeology would like to thank Stuart Fanti of Bond Davidson Ltd Consulting for commissioning the work. Wessex Archaeology would also like to acknowledge the help and assistance of Alexander Kidd, Senior Archaeological Officer of Buckinghamshire Archaeological Service who monitored the evaluation on behalf of Aylesbury Vale District Council.

John Mills of Wrekin Construction, the designated contractors, is thanked for his help and assistance, in particular for organising the cutting of the tarmac and the supply of panelled fencing.

The fieldwork was carried out by Peter James and Jamie Wright. The report was prepared by Jamie Wright. The illustrations were prepared by Will Foster and the finds were assessed by Lorraine Mepham. The project was managed on behalf of Wessex Archaeology by Caroline Budd.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Bond Davidson Ltd on behalf of Porsche Cars Great Britain Ltd (the Client), to undertake an archaeological evaluation in advance of the reuse of the existing tarmac surface in connection with the adjacent Porsche Driving Experience track, on land to the rear of Becketts' Grandstand, at Silverstone Motor Racing Circuit, Biddlesden, Buckinghamshire, centred on NGR 468190 241880 (hereafter the Site, see **Figure 1**).

1.1.2 The archaeological evaluation was required in advance of the determination of the Client's planning application to Aylesbury Vale District Council (Planning Reference: 07/1466), the local planning authority, for the proposed development.

1.1.3 A Brief for the archaeological evaluation was produced by the Buckinghamshire County Archaeology Service (BCAS 2007) and this formed the basis of a Written Scheme of Investigation (Wessex Archaeology 2007) setting out in detail the methodology to be employed by Wessex Archaeology to meet these specifications. In format and content it conformed with current best practice and to the guidance outlined in *Management of Archaeological Projects* (English Heritage 1999) and the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (as amended 1994).

1.2 Site Location, Topography and Geology

1.2.1 The Site is located in an area to the rear of Becketts' Grandstand at NGR 468190 241880, on the eastern perimeter of the Silverstone Racing Circuit close to the Buckinghamshire/Northamptonshire county boundary.

- 1.2.2 A large area of the Site is under tarmac, laid within the last two or three years, and its current use is as a showcase area for Formula One vehicles. It is relatively flat and situated at 152m above Ordnance Datum (aOD). The eastern fringe of the Site contained a small clump of trees and a grassed area crossed by a tarmaced access road. Fields beyond the perimeter of the racing circuit gently undulated suggesting that the horizontal surfaces within the perimeter were the result of landscaping associated with the former airfield or the Motor Racing Circuit.
- 1.2.3 The Racing Circuit, and the airfield before it, is situated on locally high ground with streams draining away in all directions. Immediately east of the Site a stream is mapped as draining north-eastwards along a field boundary then flowing south-east to join the Great Ouse River.
- 1.2.4 The underlying geology of the Site comprises Jurassic Great Oolite Series overlain by Boulder Clay/Morainic Drift (Geological Map of Great Britain, Sheet 2, 2nd ed., 1957: Quaternary Map of the United Kingdom South, 1st ed., 1977).

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL/HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Archaeological and Historical Background

- 2.1.1 The Site lies in close proximity to the site of the medieval chapel of St Thomas a Beckett. The chapel was apparently founded in the 13th century and given to the nearby Luffield Priory shortly thereafter. After the Dissolution it was converted into two dwellings and partially rebuilt in the 17th century (VCH, 1969, 188).
- 2.1.2 The chapel was demolished in 1943 to make way for Silverstone airfield, during which time some photographic records were made and architectural stonework retained. The east and west walls were dated to the 15th century whilst the north and south walls were 17th century. A gravestone was discovered in 1732 and this is the only indication of an associated cemetery (Bucks SMR 0728), although an adjacent 'close' could have contained a cemetery or associated domestic occupation.
- 2.1.3 The chapel lay within the small and now deserted hamlet of Chapel Green, recorded on old maps of the county, part of a dispersed medieval settlement pattern observed in the Whittlewood area (Jones and Page 2006). The Buckinghamshire County GIS indicates that the chapel was centred at 468175 241902.

3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

3.1 General

- 3.1.1 To determine or confirm the presence/absence and the general nature of any remains present.
- 3.1.2 To determine or confirm the approximate date or date range of any remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence where development is proposed.

3.2 Specific

- 3.2.1 To establish the location of St Thomas's chapel in relation to the proposed development and to establish the presence/absence of an associated burial ground.
- 3.2.2 To establish whether domestic occupation associated with Chapel Green extends into the development area.
- 3.2.3 To attempt to confirm the accuracy of the mapped position of the chapel.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Fieldwork

- 4.1.1 The proposed development involves the excavation of drainage ditches on and in close proximity to the site of the medieval chapel of St Thomas a Becket and was therefore subject to an archaeological evaluation comprising four 30m x 1.6m trenches, located along the proposed drainage runs and in relation to a transcription of the relevant historic maps, as indicated on **Figure 1**.
- 4.1.2 The trench locations were laid out by the Client's proposed contractors who also cut the tarmac where necessary. All trenches were stripped using a mechanical excavator, under constant archaeological supervision. Trenches excavated through tarmac were started using a c. 0.3m wide bucket to remove tarmac but thereafter all stripping used a 1.6m wide toothless ditching bucket.
- 4.1.3 Spoil from the trenches was stored on sheeting to protect the tarmaced surface. Excavated tarmac was separated from other material to avoid contamination due to its bituminous nature. The turves from the surface of trenches excavated through the grassed area were stored separately and reinstated over the backfilled uprisings.

- 4.1.4 The area of the evaluation was surrounded by panelled fencing to prevent accidental vehicular access.
- 4.1.5 All overburden was removed to the top of the natural geology or to the top of the archaeological deposits, whichever was higher.
- 4.1.6 The locations of the trenches were three dimensionally recorded using a Global Positioning System (GPS).
- 4.1.7 The fieldwork was undertaken, over a period of six days, between 6th and 13th August 2007.

4.2 Constraints

- 4.2.1 Half of the total length of the trenches was cut through a 110mm thick tarmac surface. To avoid excessive damage to this it was cut by a mechanical wheel before excavation. This was time consuming and made it impractical to either extend or widen trenches further to clarify findings.
- 4.2.2 To avoid damage to the tarmac surface all excavated spoil was stockpiled on tarpaulin or plastic sheeting. The tarmac was stored on one side of the trench and the gravels and other overburden on the other.
- 4.2.3 The trenches through the tarmac surface had to be excavated to a depth of 1m before exposing the top of archaeological deposits. On Health and Safety grounds this meant that only the upper level of the substantial features exposed could be investigated by hand.
- 4.2.4 Once manual excavation ceased the ditches in Trenches 1 and 3 were mechanically excavated, the latter to 2m below ground surface. Recording was undertaken from ground level and the trenches were not entered.

5 RESULTS

- 5.1.1 A table of the trench and context descriptions is included in the Appendix. These elements are summarised and discussed below.
- 5.1.2 All context numbers are trench specific; therefore context **104** was located in Trench 1, **401** in Trench 4 etc.

5.2 Depositional Sequence

- 5.2.1 All the excavated trenches showed an increase of surface level by importation and spreading of material. This was greater in the area of tarmac where the upper surface of former topsoil was present at 0.65m depth, while in the grassed area a depth of between 0.2m and 0.3m of imported topsoil appeared to have been laid onto the original ground surface, possibly contemporary with the laying of the tarmac.
- 5.2.2 Where trenches were excavated through tarmac an overburden of bitumen surface, gravels and former topsoil with a cumulative depth of 1m had to be removed to reach geological deposits and any archaeological features cut into the horizon.
- 5.2.3 The former topsoil was a grey fine sandy loam with a depth of 0.2m to 0.3m. Beneath were geological deposits of fine sandy loam with small rounded gravel components. Its colour varied between a pale grey to a strong reddish brown. The amount of gravel in the sand also varied with stone free fine layers and lenses of sand being present.

5.3 Archaeological Features

- 5.3.1 In the northern end of Trench 1 was a north-east to south-west aligned feature. This continued beyond the extent of the trench and where visible was 4m wide. Its exposed south-eastern edge sloped gently and a hand excavated intervention, **107**, at the north end of the trench showed the deposits were slumping steeply to the south. A large amount of demolition rubble comprising limestone fragments and tile, including glazed ridge tile and plain floor tile fragments, was recovered from fill **106**. Fill **106** was sealed by redeposited natural, **105**, which could be seen in the edge of trench section to be below former topsoil, **104**. The slumping of this relict topsoil confirmed the north-west to south-east alignment of the feature.
- 5.3.2 A 4m wide and c. 1m deep ditch was present in Trenches 2 and 3. Its orientation was also north-east to south-west.
- 5.3.3 In both trenches an overburden of c. 1.0m was mechanically removed to expose the ditch, limiting the amount of manual excavation possible. On the advice of the Senior Archaeological Officer for Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service the ditch was mechanically excavated in Trench 3. On Health and Safety grounds the exposed section was not closely recorded but photographs were taken and a sketch section was prepared from ground level.
- 5.3.4 In the machined section (in Trench 3) the sides of the ditch sloped gently to a flat base with a depth of c. 1m. Overlying a primary fill of eroded gravel was a dark fine sandy loam containing some fragments of limestone, presumed building demolition rubble, and gravel.

- 5.3.5 In Trench 2 the sides of the ditch sloped at c. 45°. Lining the edge of the cut was a gravelly fill, **207** and **212**, containing limestone fragments. Overlying this fill **208**, on the north-western edge of the ditch, produced a sherd of 13th/14th century pottery and medieval roof and floor tile fragments together with post-medieval pottery, glass and Ceramic Building Material (CBM). A redeposited natural, **209**, covered the top of the ditch and this was seen in the edge of the trench to be sealed by former topsoil, **203**, which extended beyond the limits of the ditch.
- 5.3.6 In Trench 4 an oval pit **405** measuring 0.5m by 0.7m and 0.2m deep was partially exposed within the trench. Although no closely datable artefacts were recovered many fragments of wood were present and these combined with the unleached colour of the pit fill suggest a relatively recent date for this feature.
- 5.3.7 Two 0.5m wide linear features excavated in Trenches 2 and 4 were shown to contain a modern service.

6 FINDS

- 6.1.1 A small quantity of finds was recovered during the evaluation, derived from two of the four trenches excavated (Trenches 1 and 2). This small assemblage ranges in date from medieval to post-medieval.

6.2 Medieval

- 6.2.1 Medieval finds comprise one sherd of pottery from ditch fill **208** (coarse greyware, 13th/14th century), medieval roof tile and plain floor tile fragments. A similar assemblage was recovered from feature fill **106** which also included two fragments of glazed ridge tile.
- 6.2.2 A small, decorated copper alloy strapend from fill **105** is of late medieval or early post-medieval date.
- 6.2.3 None of these medieval items was found *in situ*, but all occurred residually in post-medieval contexts.

6.3 Post-Medieval

- 6.3.1 The remaining finds are post-medieval, comprising fragments of CBM (field drain and brick), vessel and window glass, clay pipe stems, roofing slate, iron (binding strips and nails) and pottery. The pottery includes sherds of tinglazed earthenware, Staffordshire-type slipwares, English stonewares, coarse redwares, white saltglaze and refined redwares and whitewares. Apart from the refined wares, which are of modern date (19th/20th century), and which were found unstratified in Trench 1, the pottery suggests a date range extending no later than the early 18th century.

Table 1: All finds by context (number / weight in grammes)

Context	Animal Bone	CBM	Glass	Pottery	Metal	Other Finds
Tr 1 U/S			5/27	3/7		
105	3/21		3/6	11/102	4 Fe; 1 Cu	2 clay pipe
106		18/1209				
208	2/3	5/387	1/83	12/245		
212		6/3726				
213	1/104	3/197	5/67	1/43	3 Fe	1 slate
TOTALS	6/128	32/5519	14/183	27/397	7 Fe; 1 Cu	

CBM = ceramic building material; Cu = copper alloy; Fe = iron

6.4 Further recommendations

6.4.1 This small assemblage has no potential for further analysis. Given the small size of the assemblage, and its date range, retention for long-term curation is not recommended, and these finds could be discarded.

7 ENVIRONMENTAL

7.1.1 No material suitable for environmental analysis was demonstrated to be present within the evaluation trenches.

8 DISCUSSION

8.1 Position of the Chapel

8.1.1 The evaluation has revealed a substantial ditch 12m from the postulated position of the chapel of St Thomas and on an apparently similar alignment. Only the uppermost fills of the ditch could be investigated due to Health and Safety constraints; however these contained a mixture of medieval and post-medieval artefacts, some of which were of high status, and would seem to confirm that the position of the former chapel has been recorded correctly.

8.1.2 Further confirmation is supplied by the large amount of demolition rubble recovered. Among the many fragments of limestone were pieces of glazed ridge tile and plain floor tile. Material of this kind was only used on churches, manor houses or similar well appointed buildings and consequently their presence helps to confirm the nearby position of the chapel.

8.2 Possible stream

- 8.2.1 The large ditch in Trenches 2 and 3 was oriented north-east to south-west. It varied slightly in profile between the two trenches - the hand excavated interventions in Trench 2 and the mechanically excavated intervention in Trench 3. The gently sloping sides observed in Trench 3 may be the result of erosion although the same had not occurred in Trench 2.
- 8.2.2 It is possible that this feature was originally dug as a drainage channel leading to the canalised stream shown, on the present 1:25000 Ordnance Survey map, to follow the field boundary (**Figure 1**). If this had been a canalised stream it would account for the variable slope of the sides and it would be consistent with the predominantly fine textured fill observed in Trench 3.
- 8.2.3 The present 1:25000 Ordnance Survey map shows the Motor Circuit, and its predecessor the airfield, to be located on a slightly raised area within the surrounding country side; such a position would be necessary for an airfield. The map also shows streams radiating from beyond the boundary of the circuit. It is probable that road and parking surfaces and associated drainage have altered the original drainage pattern and that streams had previously flowed from closer to the centre of the present Motor Racing Circuit.
- 8.2.4 Another possibility is that the ditch formed an enclosure around the chapel or that it defined the 'close' adjacent to the chapel. In order to enclose the chapel the feature would have had to turn north before reaching Trench 1. The large feature, 107, seen in Trench 1 may represent such a turn although the only edge observed was aligned north-west to south-east.
- 8.2.5 The large feature in Trench 1 is slightly enigmatic. It has similar dimensions to the ditch in Trenches 2 and 3 and also appears to be oriented north-east to south-west. Although there was a shift of 8m in the lines of the two ditches it may be that they are a part of the same feature.
- 8.2.6 These two large features observed in Trenches 1, 2 and 3 had been abandoned and largely infilled by the early 18th century, after which time topsoil became established over the area.

9 CONCLUSION

- 9.1.1 As previously indicated, the archaeological deposits on the Site are likely to lie below an overburden of bitumen surface, gravels and former topsoil with a cumulative depth of up to 1m. However, given the proposed scheme of works for drainage on the Site, which indicates a maximum formation level of 1.70m, it is likely that the impact on any existing archaeological remains will be high.

10 ARCHIVE

10.1.1 The project archive is currently held at the offices of Wessex Archaeology, under the site code reference **66880**. It is recommended that it is deposited with the Buckinghamshire County Museum, Aylesbury at a future date.

10.1.2 The archive comprises :

- 4 Trench Record Sheets
- 3 Continuation Sheets
- 13 Context Records
- 7 A5 Drawings
- 8 Photographic Records
- 3 colour transparency films and 3 black and white negative films
- Digital photographs
- Digital Survey Data

11 REFERENCES

Buckinghamshire County Archaeology Service, 2007, *Brief for an Archaeological Field Evaluation (Trial Trenching): Driving Experience Track, Land to the Rear of Beckett's Grandstand, Silverstone Racing Circuit*, Unpublished Rep.

Jones, R and Page, M, 2006, *Medieval Villages in an English Landscape: Beginnings and Ends*

VCH, 1969, *The Victoria County History of the Counties of England; Buckinghamshire, Vol. 4*

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APPENDIX: TRENCH SUMMARY TABLE

TRENCH 1

NGR	468165.8, 241863.6, 152.7		468172.0, 241894.1, 152.7	
Dimensions	Length 31.98, Width 1.7, Max. depth 0.98 (m)			
Context	Description	Depth (m)		
100	Tarmac and gravel.	0 – 0.30		
101	Gravel: Spread before tarmac was laid.	0.30 – 0.40		
102	Gravel: As 101.	0.40 – 0.50		
103	Redeposited natural: Overlying 104.	0.50 – 0.63		
104	Old topsoil: A dark greyish brown fine sandy loam.	0.63 – 0.75		
105	Fill: A dark orange brown sandy loam with frequent small stones – redeposited natural.	0.75 – 1.03		
106	Fill: A greyish brown fine sandy loam. Bands of rounded and angular small stones slumped down to the S. Much limestone building rubble also slumped S. A glazed ridge tile was present.	0.75 – >1.20		
107	Cut: The N edge not seen, the S edge was 4m from the N of the trench and ran SE.	0.75 - >1.20		

TRENCH 2

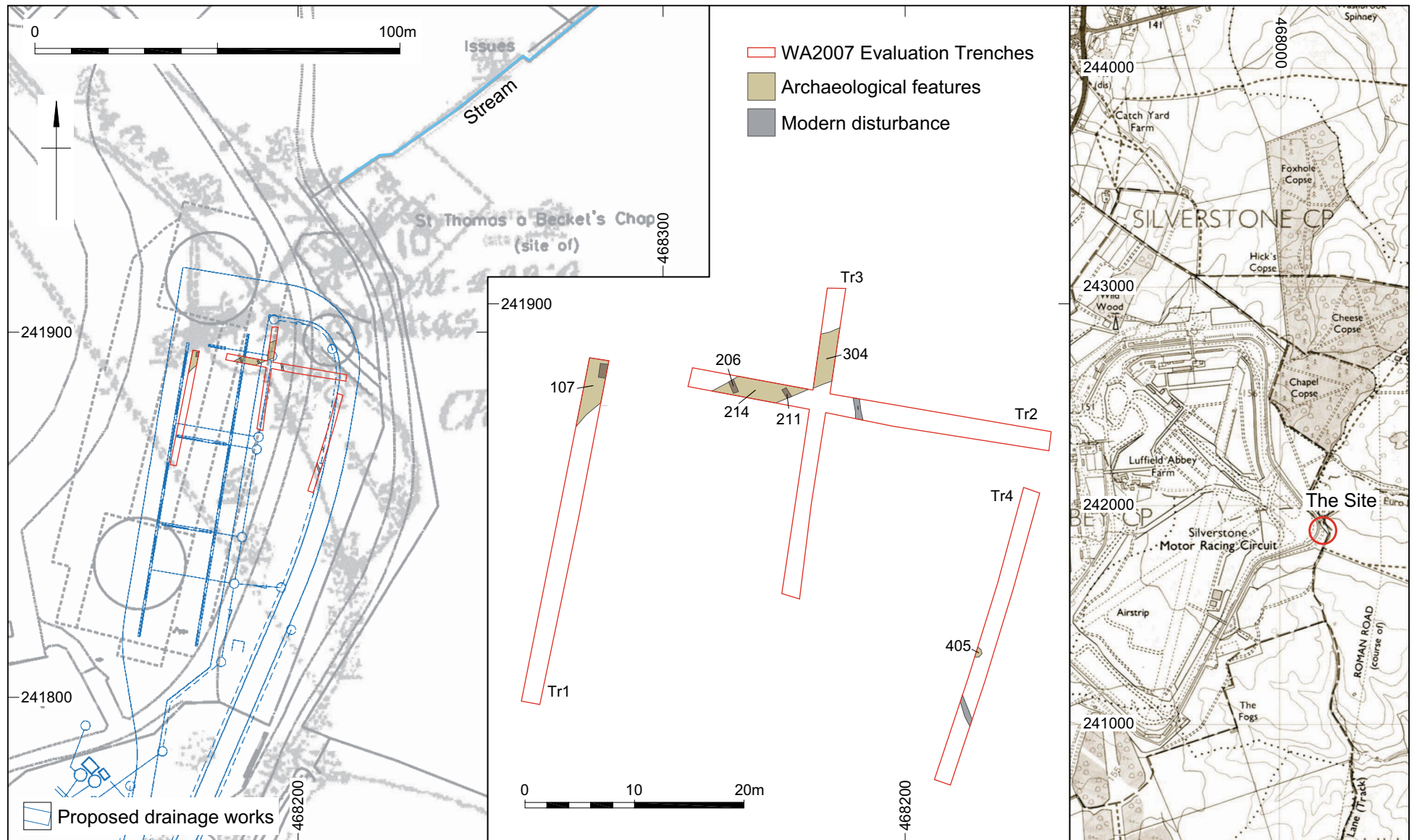
NGR	468180.4, 241893.5, 152.6		468213.2, 241887.5, 151.9	
Dimensions	Length 33.0, Width 1.8, Max. depth 1.0 (m)			
Context	Description	Depth (m)		
201	Tarmac:	0 – 0.11		
202	Gravel: Mostly 0.35m thick, but deeper over large ditch.	0.11 – 0.45		
203	Former topsoil: A grey sandy loam with many reddish brown mottles and relatively stone free.	0.65 – 0.80		
204	Tarmac and gravel: In the E of trench was an access road.	0 – c. 0.5		
205	Natural: Reddish brown sandy loam. With abundant gravel in patches. Areas of grey were present.	> 0.60		
206	Ditch segment: Excavated on the NW edge of large ditch Not bottomed on H&S grounds the side sloped at c. 45°.	0.80 – 1.2		
207	Fill of 206: A grey sandy loam with frequent gravel lining the edge of the cut.	0.80 – 1.20		
208	Fill of 206: A greyish brown sandy loam with occasional gravel that formed the principal fill of the intervention and produced all of the artefacts.	0.80 – 1.20		
209	Fill of 206: A layer of redeposited natural sealing the ditch.	0.80 – 0.90		
210	Layer of silty loam: Overlay the former topsoil and was probably a part of layer 202.	0.45 – 0.65		
211	Ditch segment: Excavated on the SE edge of the large ditch this showed this edge to be straight and steep.	0.80 – 1.20		
212	Fill of 211: A yellowish brown sandy loam. Frequent limestone fragments were present with brick, CBM and pottery.	0.80 – 1.20		
213	Fill of 211: A greyish brown relatively stone free fill at the top of the intervention.	0.80 – 1.00		

TRENCH 3

NGR	468193.8, 241901.4, 152.4	468189.5, 241873.3, 152.3
Dimensions	Length 28.4, Width 1.7, Max. depth 2.0 (m)	
Context	Description	Depth (m)
301	Topsoil: Greyish brown fine sandy loam. A very firm soil that showed much layering and that appeared to have been recently imported to raise the ground surface.	0.00 - 0.27
302	?Buried topsoil: A pale greyish brown sandy loam containing gravel and CBM throughout.	0.27 – 0.51
303	Natural: Reddish brown sandy loam with frequent to abundant angular to rounded gravel. Patches of this were grey.	>0.51
304	Ditch: A 4m wide ditch also seen in Trench 2. This was mechanically excavated to 2m below the ground surface.	1.10 – 2.00
305	Fill: The highest fill of the ditch was a topsoil like and contained brick/CBM, charcoal and limestone fragments. Inspection from ground level, after mechanical excavation, suggested that this continued the top of 306 ..	1.10 – c. 1.8
306	Fill: A primary fill , of sand and gravel lining the edge of the cut. Recorded from ground surface.	c. 1.8 – 2.0

TRENCH 4

NGR	468203.4, 241856.3, 152.0	468211.6, 241883.0, 151.8
Dimensions	Length 27.9 Width 1.5, Max. depth 0.5 (m)	
Context	Description	Depth (m)
401	Topsoil: Greyish brown fine sandy loam, under grass.	0.00- 0.23
402	?Former topsoil: A brown fine sandy loam with few stones. Trowelled smoothly.	0.23 – 0.35
403	Natural: A fine sandy loam with many stones. The colour varied from reddish brown to pale grey.	>0.35
404	Fill: A dark greyish brown sandy loam that contained much wood or root.	
405	Pit: An oval shape that extended beyond the W of the trench.	



- WA2007 Evaluation Trenches
- Archaeological features
- Modern disturbance



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Site and trench locations showing archaeological features


Figure 1



Plate 1: Ditch 107 (view from the west)



Plate 2: Ditch 304 after mechanical excavation (view from the south-west)

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BECKETTS

A chapel commemorating the death of St Thomas A Beckett was originally on this site. The corner has changed its appearance numerous times since 1948. Originally the slowest corner on the track, Becketts is now one the most exciting F1 corners in the world.

guide

ABBAY
corner guide

WOODCOTE
corner guide

COPSE
corner guide



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