

**Aylesbury Masonic Hall, Ripon Street, Aylesbury,
Buckinghamshire**

**An Archaeological Recording Action
for Wakefield Building Services**

by Andrew Mordin

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code RIA 08/60

June 2008

Summary

Site name: Aylesbury Masonic Hall, Ripon Street, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire

Grid reference: SP 8169 1399

Site activity: Archaeological recording action

Date and duration of project: 20th May 2008

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Andrew Muddin

Site code: RIA 08/60

Area of site: c. 96 sq m

Summary of results: No footing sections were available to view, and no test pits could be excavated due to fears over the structural stability of a nearby wall.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with the Buckinghamshire Museum Service in due course.

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Aylesbury Masonic Hall, Ripon Street, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire An Archaeological Recording Action

by Andrew Muddin

Report 08/60

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological recording action carried out at the rear of the Aylesbury Masonic Hall, Ripon Street, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire (SP 8169 1399) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Paul Wakefield, of Wakefield Building Services, 5 Richmond Road, Aylesbury, HP20 1PL on behalf of Aylesbury Masonic Centre.

Planning permission (03/01045) was granted by Aylesbury Vale District Council for the construction of a rear extension to the Masonic Hall. The consent is subject to a condition which requires the implementation of a programme of archaeological work during groundworks.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the District Council's policies on archaeology. The archaeological potential of the site was highlighted in a brief prepared by Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service (Radford 2008). Unfortunately, the groundworks had already been undertaken prior to the archaeological work being commissioned. The inspection was undertaken by Andrew Muddin on 20th May 2008, and the site code is RIA 08/60. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with the Buckinghamshire Museum Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The extension is being constructed to the rear of the Masonic Hall, on the south side of Ripon Street in the centre of Aylesbury. The underlying geology of the site is Portland Limestone (BGS 1980), a low ridge within the Kimmeridge Clay, which runs north-east towards Bierton. The site sits at c.88m above Ordnance Datum (OD).

Archaeological background

Aylesbury, in general, has a rich and varied archaeological sequence spanning periods from the Neolithic to the later post-medieval. The town's origins are thought to lie in the Saxon period which is corroborated by its mention in the Anglo Saxon Chronicles. The name implies the town may have originated from a late Saxon

'burh' though no other evidence for this exists. St. Mary's Church is thought to be on the site of the early minister church. However earlier activity is also known from the town.

The Walton area of the town has had several excavations carried out just off Walton Road. It has revealed evidence of prehistoric activity in the form of Mesolithic struck flints through to Bronze Age activity in the form of refuse pits, structures and cremations (Farley 1976; Ford *et al* 2004). An Iron Age hillfort had also been identified in the town which was later reused, enclosing the minister church and town (Blair 1994). Further fieldwork in the town has recorded two Iron Age ditches on Bicester Road (Norton 1999).

Roman activity is less well recorded in the town with the majority of entries in the SMR relating to find spots, such as of coins, from various locations. The projected route of the Akeman Street Roman road, which connected St Albans to Alchester, is thought to lie to the north west of the site. Fieldwork in the Walton area has identified Roman activity in the form of boundary ditches or field systems (Farley 1994).

Recent fieldwork carried out to the south of the site on Walton Street revealed archaeological deposits in the form of ditches, pits and postholes. Although many of the features were undated, pottery retrieved from the site suggests many of the features were Saxon or medieval; some post medieval activity was also recorded (AS 2005). A watching brief and evaluation on Exchange Street recorded a deep sequence of alluvial deposits, ranging in depth from 0.79m to 2m. This evaluation also recorded a backfilled channel, possibly an earlier course of the Bear Brook, providing some information about the post-medieval management of the water course, as well as stratigraphic deposits which indicate the natural silting and meandering of the Brook. A natural spur of drift was noted which was sealed by a medieval soil, however, the only features encountered on site were post medieval, or modern, pits which truncated made ground and alluvium (AS 2006).

Archaeological deposits were not encountered during work at 41 Walton Street (Jacobs Babbie 2005) or during work at Old Brewery Close and Walton Street, where an evaluation revealed that the site had experienced heavy truncation during the 19th and 20th century. A single sherd of unstratified medieval pottery was retrieved from this site (Anthony 2003)

The project is primarily concerned with the site in the projected course of the Iron Age hill fort (SMR 06743) include this site and Iron Age pitting and post-holes have been identified 80m to the south-west of the site of Sainsbury's (SMR 0499101). Late Iron Age deposits have not been identified to date although some residual sherds of this date have been noted in the town and fragments of 'Belgic' brick were noted in gullies recorded on the northern side of George Street (Allen 1991). Roman occupation was recorded from the

Sainsbury's site, which consisted of intercutting gully's and pit containing an articulated horse skeleton. The line of the Roman Road of Akeman Street (A41), runs north-west to south east, sits 200m to the north of the site.

A possible 17th to 18th century clay pipe kiln was found in development works on Whitehall Street (CAS1821).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the recording action was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by groundworks. This was to involved examination of all areas of deep foundation trenching truncating down through possible archaeological relevant layers to natural geology. The specific research aims of this project were:

To determine if archaeological relevant material survived on this site;

To determine if archaeology of any period are present;

To establish whether there is evidence/potential for Iron Age activity associated with the hillfort or finds or Saxon occupation or defence survived, or other Saxon, Medieval or Post-Medieval activity or industrial activity.

As the groundworks had already commenced, it was recommended that an assessment of the damage to underlying deposits was noted and any chance taken to record any exposed section. Where possible it was to be assessed if sample test pitting was available to gain a stratigraphic sequence of the site.

Results

On arrival at the site, it was noted that all footings had been excavated, and that no visible sections could be viewed. Available ground at the southern edge of the footings could not be excavated due to the proximity of a brick wall forming the site boundary.

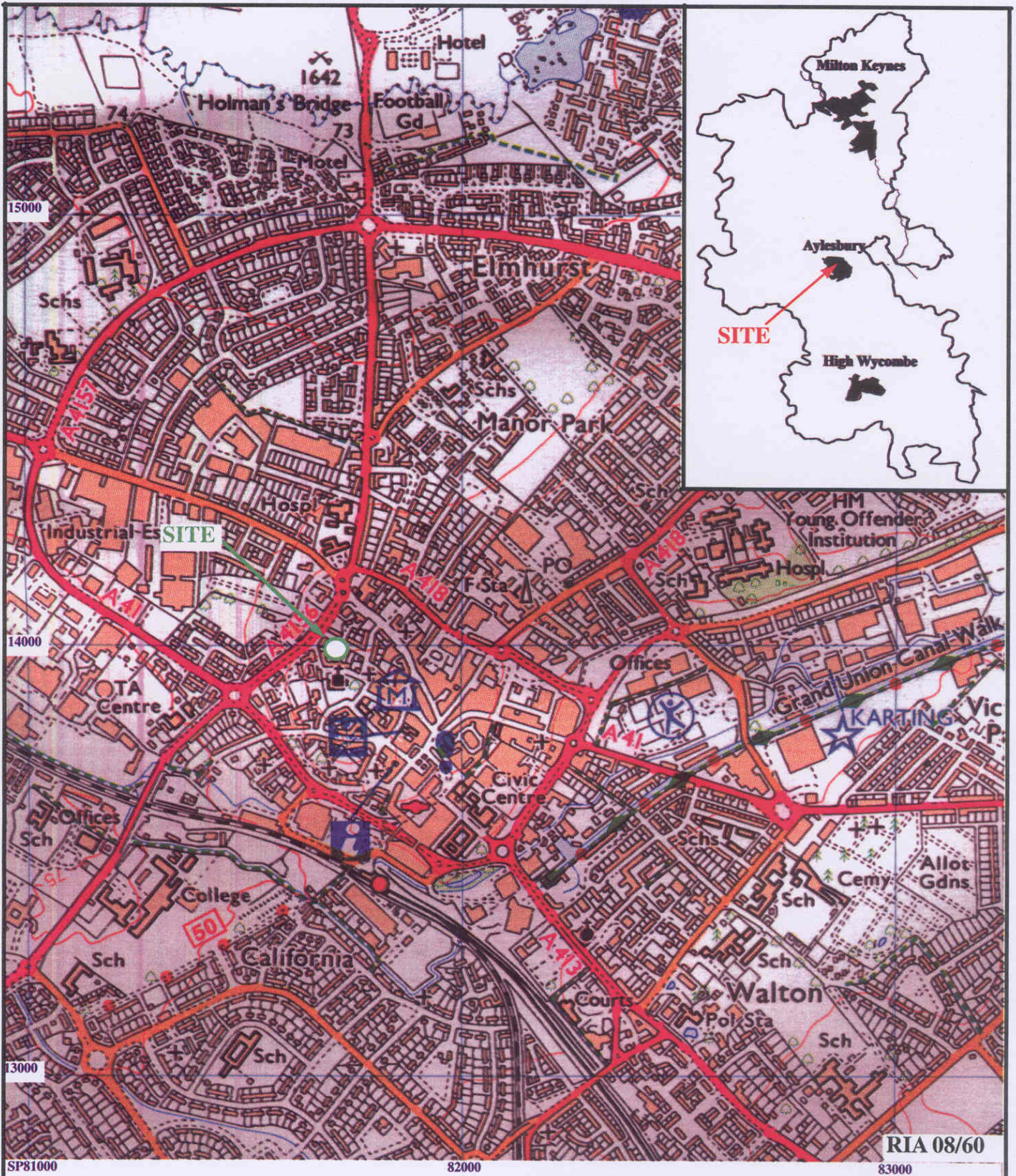
Measurements taken on site showed that the ground outside the footing had been reduced 0.25m (Fig. 3), exposing compact dark brown silty clay soil, which seemed to contain Victorian material. This was mostly likely a made ground. It was also noted that the inner ground level within the new footings had been reduced by 0.4m (Fig. 3) and this seemed to exposed the same make up material. According to the contractor on site, hard geology, most probably limestone, was reached at 0.7m below this level reaching a total depth from the original ground surface of 1.1m deep.

Conclusion

The groundworks were too far advanced to allow for inspection of the footing trenches nor areas of reduced dig. An alternative response to machine dig new test pits to allow observation of the stratigraphy could not be carried out due to the proximity of the unstable boundary wall.

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Figure 1. Location of site within Aylesbury and Buckinghamshire.

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Figure 2. Detailed location of site on Ripon Street.

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Figure 3. Areas affected by groundworks.