RIVERSTONE HOUSE
WESTFIELD ROAD
OAKLEY
BEDFORDSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION, INVESTIGATION, RECORDING, ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

Albion archaeology

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Prepared on behalf of:
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LIST OF FIGURES

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Preface

Every effort has been made in the preparation and submission of this document and all statements are offered in good faith. Albion Archaeology cannot accept responsibility for errors of fact or opinion resulting from data supplied by a third party, or for any loss or other consequence arising from decisions or actions made upon the basis of facts or opinions expressed in this document.

This report has been prepared by Wiebke Starke (Archaeological Supervisor), Holly Duncan (Artefacts Manager) and Jackie Wells (Artefacts Officer). It was illustrated and edited by David Ingham (Project Officer). Wiebke Starke and Anna Rebisz-Niziolek (Assistant Archaeological Supervisor) undertook the fieldwork. All Albion Archaeology projects are under the overall management of Drew Shotliff (Operations Manager).

Albion Archaeology is grateful to Victoria Coubrough for commissioning the project. We would also like to acknowledge the co-operation of Charles Britton (Building Contractor), and the assistance of Vanessa Clarke and Geoff Saunders of Bedford Borough Council's Historic Environment Team.

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Structure of the Report

After the introductory Section 1, Section 2 describes the extent of the watching brief. The results of the fieldwork are presented in Section 3, and summarised in Section 4. Section 5 is a bibliography.

Key Terms

The following terms or abbreviations are used throughout this report:

BBC	Bedford Borough Council
HER	Historic Environment Record
HET	Historic Environment Team
I*f*A	Institute for Archaeologists
Procedures Manual	*Procedures Manual Volume 1 Fieldwork*, 2nd edn, 2001 Albion Archaeology
WSI	Written Scheme of Investigation

Non-Technical Summary

A planning application was approved by Bedford Borough Council (BBC) for the construction of a manège with associated fencing and drainage at Riverstone House, Westfield Road, Oakley, Bedfordshire. As the development lies within an area of significant archaeological sensitivity, the Council's Historic Environment Team (HET) recommended that a condition should be attached to the planning consent requiring the implementation of a programme of archaeological work. Albion Archaeology was commissioned to carry out an archaeological watching brief, in line with a Written Scheme of Investigation that was approved beforehand by the HET.

The intended manège occupies an area of c. *0.12ha on the western edge of Oakley at TL 0024 5325. It lies at a height of* c. *40m OD, with the land falling slightly to the south-east, in the direction of the river Great Ouse. The underlying drift geology of the area comprises river terrace sands and gravels.*

The development site lies within the Great Ouse valley, which has been a focus for settlement from the early prehistoric period onwards. Oakley itself is medieval in origin (HER17069). Medieval pottery of 12th–13th-century date (HER7683) has been recorded c. *300m to the south-east, along with Romano-British coins and pottery, and 17th and 18th-century coins. Further Roman and medieval finds are recorded within the wider area to the south-east (HER1321 and HER10806), while a crop-mark of a probable Bronze Age ring ditch has been identified* c. *500m to the south-west, on the opposite bank of the river.*

Monitoring of the groundworks on 4th–6th October 2011 revealed an undated north–south ditch in a trench dug south of the manège, where overburden was removed down to the top of undisturbed geological deposits. No archaeological features were encountered in the area of the manège itself, where the groundworks were mostly shallower. Pottery fragments and flint artefacts were retrieved from the topsoil and subsoil, however, attesting to activity in the area dating from the late Neolithic to the medieval period.

The generally shallow nature of the groundworks means that any potential archaeological remains beneath the manège have been preserved in situ.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

A planning application (11/01375/COU) was approved by Bedford Borough Council (BBC) for the construction of a manège with associated fencing and drainage at Riverstone House, Westfield Road, Oakley, Bedfordshire.

As the development lies within an area of significant archaeological sensitivity, a condition was attached to the planning consent requiring the implementation of a programme of archaeological work. This was done on the advice of the Historic Environment Team (HET) of the BBC, in accordance with the guidelines provided in *Planning Policy 5: Planning for the Historic Environment* (DCLG 2010). The requirements of this programme of work were set out in a brief issued by the HET (BBC 2010).

Albion Archaeology was commissioned to carry out the archaeological watching brief and to produce this report on the results. A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for the work was prepared (Albion 2011) and approved by the HET.

1.2 Site Location and Description

The manège occupies an area of *c*. 0.12ha on the western edge of the village of Oakley at TL 0024 5325 (Fig. 1). It lies at a height of *c*. 40m OD, with the land falling slightly to the south-east, in the direction of the river Great Ouse. The underlying drift geology of the area mostly comprises undifferentiated sandy gravel and gravelly sand of the Stoke Goldington and Felmersham Members of the Ouse Valley Formation (BGS Sheet 203, 2010).

1.3 Archaeological Background

The development site lies on the edge of the village of Oakley within the Great Ouse valley, which has been a focus for settlement from the early prehistoric period onwards. The light, well-drained soils in combination with the varied riparian environment are ideal for sustaining a mixed farming economy, while the river itself acted as a major artery for trade, communication and the movement of people.

Oakley itself is medieval in origin (HER17069). Medieval pottery of 12th–13th-century date (HER7683) has been recorded *c*. 300m to the south-east, along with Romano-British coins and pottery, and 17th and 18th-century coins. Further Roman and medieval finds are recorded within the wider area to the south-east (HER1321 and HER10806), while *c*. 500m to the south-west, on the opposite bank of the river, a crop-mark of a probable Bronze Age ring ditch has been identified.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

The watching brief was undertaken on 4th–6th October 2011. During this period, all groundworks which required monitoring were completed (Fig. 1). A mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket was used for all machine excavation.

All archaeological features and deposits were issued a unique context number, specific to that feature or deposit. Within this report, context numbers referring to cut features are expressed [**], and layers or deposits within cut features are expressed (**).

2.2 Methodology

A full methodology is provided in the WSI (Albion Archaeology 2011). In summary:

- All machine excavation with the potential to reveal archaeological remains was monitored to identify any *in situ* archaeological deposits that were revealed.
- All disturbed soil was scanned for artefacts.
- All excavated deposits were recorded in accordance with Albion's *Procedures Manual* and the WSI.
- All archaeological features were recorded on measured plans, with sections drawn at 1:10 scale. All artefacts were assigned to their relevant context number.
- An appropriate photographic record was maintained for all significant deposits, along with overall photographs of the groundworks undertaken.

The project adhered throughout to the standards set out in the IFA's *Code of Conduct* and *Standards and Guidance* documents (specifically *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief*, September 1999), in English Heritage's *Management of Archaeological Projects* (1991) and in Albion's *Procedures Manual*.

2.3 Extent and Nature of Groundworks

The groundworks comprised a combination of ground-level reduction and build-up to create a level surface for the manège, followed by the excavation of drainage runs below foundation level and a shallow cut-off drain to the north. In addition, a *c*. 5m x 20m trench was dug to the south of the manège to extract clay for use in building up the south-west corner of the manège. With the agreement of the HET, excavation of the drainage runs was not monitored, since they had very limited potential to reveal archaeological remains.

The area of the manège was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.9m in the north-east corner, with the depth of ground-reduction dropping to as little as 0.3m in the south-west corner. The groundworks were not deep enough to reveal any

archaeological deposits or features in the area of the manège, only reaching undisturbed geological deposits in the very north-east corner.

The trench to the south was initially machined to a depth of 0.85m — the top of the undisturbed geological deposits — before being deepened in order to extract the clay.

2.4 Project Archive

The project archive will be deposited with Bedford Museum under accession code BEDFM 2011.69.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Topsoil, Subsoil and Geological Deposits

The depth of the overburden appears to have been consistent across the development area, measuring *c*. 0.85m thick. It was split between topsoil (104), subsoil (103) and a lower subsoil (102) that is likely to have been colluvial in origin. A small assemblage of pottery sherds and flint artefacts were collected from the topsoil and subsoil.

Where observed, the undisturbed geological deposits comprised a thin layer of silty clay (101) overlying chalky clay (100).

3.2 Undated Ditch

A 1m wide, north–south ditch [105] was revealed in the trench to the south of the manège, dug through the layer of colluvium (Fig. 1). It produced no artefacts.

Context	Type	Description
100	**Natural**	**Firm mid orange/blue white chalky clay.**
101	**Natural**	**Firm mid orange silty clay.**
102	**Colluvium**	**Friable mid orange clayey sand, 0.18m thick.**
103	**Subsoil**	**Friable mid orange brown silty sand, 0.3m thick.**
104	**Topsoil**	**Friable dark grey brown sandy silt, 0.3m thick.**
105	**Ditch**	**Linear, N–S. Sides and base: concave. Width: 1m. Depth: 0.34m.**
106	Fill	Friable mid brown silty sand.

Table 1: Context summary

3.3 Finds Summary

A small finds assemblage derived from subsoil (103) and topsoil (104). The material was scanned to ascertain its nature, condition and, where possible, date range.

3.3.1 Ceramics

Fifteen moderately abraded and highly fragmented pottery sherds (109g) were recovered, with a low average sherd weight of 7g. Five fabric types were identified using common names and type codes in accordance with the Bedfordshire Ceramic Type Series, currently maintained by Albion Archaeology (Table 2).

Fabric Type	Common Name	No. Sherds	Context: No. Sherds
Iron Age			
F03	Grog and sand	**1**	(103):1
Saxo-Norman			
B01A	St Neots-type (orange)	**9**	(103):8, (104):9
B01B	St Neots-type (fine)	**3**	(103):1, (104):2
Medieval			
B07	Shell	**1**	(104):1
E01D	Late medieval reduced	**1**	(103):1

Table 2: Pottery Type Series

The earliest pottery is an abraded body sherd (25g) of probable late Iron Age date. The Saxo-Norman assemblage comprises twelve shell-tempered, wheel-thrown sherds (49g) in the St Neots-ware tradition. The only diagnostic form is a bowl rim. The St Neots-type ware ranges in date from the mid 9th to 12th centuries, peaking during the 10th–11th centuries. A shell-tempered base sherd of 12th–13th century date, and a 14th–15th century rim from a reduced sandy ware jar were also recovered.

Subsoil (103) yielded two sand-tempered fragments of post-medieval flat roof tile (17g) and two undatable pieces of fired clay (44g), possibly part of a handmade slab or brick.

3.3.2 Non-Ceramics

Three flint scrapers were recovered, all of which have suffered a degree of secondary damage. An end-and-side scraper from subsoil (103) was manufactured from a previously utilised core, as indicated by the patinated striking platform. As a type, end-and-side scrapers are difficult to closely date. They are rare in Mesolithic or early Neolithic assemblages, and occur more commonly in later Neolithic to early Bronze Age assemblages.

Topsoil (104) yielded single examples of a possible discoidal scraper and a hollow scraper. Identification of the disc scraper is uncertain, due to damage, hence closer dating beyond the Neolithic period cannot be suggested with certainty. The hollow scraper is of a form commonly found in late Neolithic to early Bronze Age assemblages, and this example has been manufactured on a previously 'struck' thermal flake, the abrupt retouch removing some of the patinated edges of the scraper.

4. SUMMARY

Archaeological observation of groundworks associated with the construction of a manège at Riverstone House, Oakley has shown that the generally shallow character of the groundworks means that any potential archaeological remains beneath the manège have been preserved *in situ*. A trench for clay extraction to the south of the manège was deep enough to reach the archaeological horizon, however, and revealed a small ditch that could not be dated. As such, this ditch is of only limited archaeological significance.

A small assemblage of flint and pottery was recovered from the overburden. Though residual, the pottery sherds indicate activity in the vicinity during the late Iron Age and the Saxo-Norman and medieval periods. The flint assemblage consists of various scrapers with secondary damage, attesting to activity dating to the late Neolithic to early Bronze Age. Such finds have little significance in their own right, but corroborate the potential of this part of Oakley to contain archaeological remains dating from the late Neolithic to the medieval period.

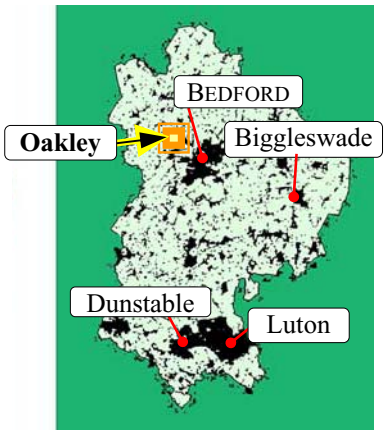
5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

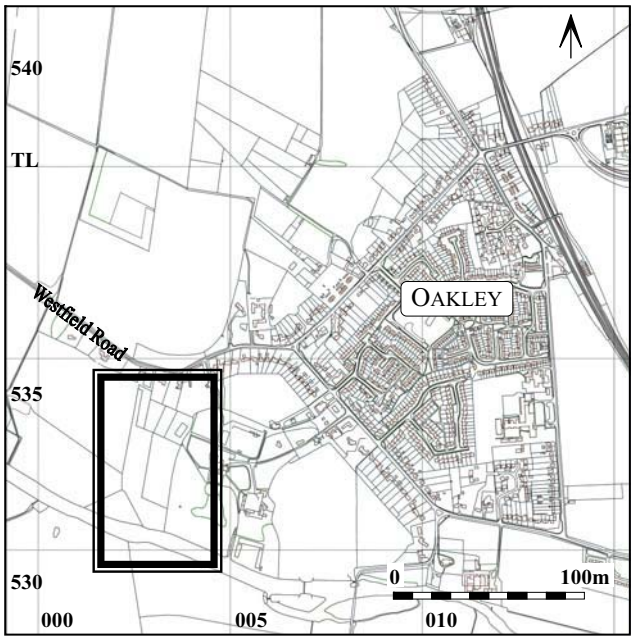
Albion Archaeology 2011: *Riverstone House, Westfield Road, Oakley, Bedfordshire: Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Observation, Investigation, Recording, Analysis and Publication*

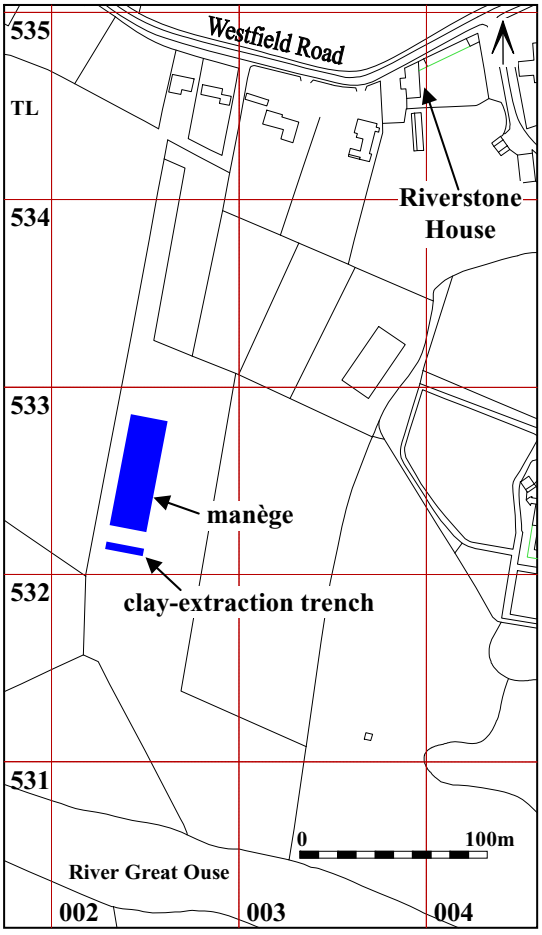
BBC 2010: *Brief for a Programme of Archaeological Observation, Investigation, Recording, Analysis and Publication: Riverstone House, Westfield Road, Oakley, Bedfordshire*

BGS 2010: *Sheet 203. Bedford Bedrock and Superficial Deposits*

DCLG 2010: *Planning Policy 5: Planning for the Historic Environment*







Photograph 1: Machining of manège, looking north

Photograph 2: Ditch [105], looking north. Scale 1m

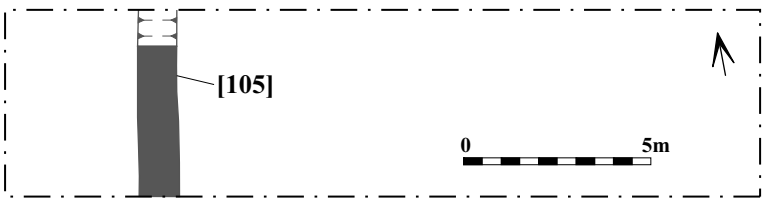


Figure 1: Site location, all-features plan and selected photographs

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