

**THE WHITE SWAN
WESTCOTT
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE**

**PROGRAMME OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL
EXCAVATION, RECORDING, ANALYSIS AND
PUBLICATION**

PRELIMINARY SUMMARY

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1. INTRODUCTION

This document presents a summary of the archaeological remains recorded during recent archaeological investigations at the site of the former 'White Swan' public house in Westcott, Buckinghamshire. Fieldwork was monitored by David Radford, the Archaeological Officer for Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service, and has now been completed.

Prior to this investigation, Pre-Construct Archaeology evaluated the archaeological potential of the site using five trial trenches (PCA 2005). Multi-period, stratified deposits were identified and the site was subsequently designated for a programme of archaeological work as a condition of planning permission.

The works were undertaken using an agreed methodology detailed in the Project Design (Albion Archaeology 2006).

1.1 Purpose of this document

Section 10a of the brief states that a preliminary statement on the results of the investigation should be produced soon after the fieldwork has been completed. This statement precedes the more detailed Assessment and Updated Project Design (as required by section 10c of the brief) which will follow in due course.

2. SITE DESCRIPTION

The site was *c.*0.97ha in size. It was adjacent to the High Street in Westcott (Figure 1) and was centred on National Grid Reference SP 7183 1711.

3. RESULTS

The programme of archaeological work revealed a sequence of activity from the Roman to modern periods.

These features and other remains from the site are briefly described below. A copy of the digitised, all features plan is attached. This has been tied in with the OS grid, and annotated, to indicate current understanding of the archaeological sequence revealed during the investigations. The forthcoming assessment report will contain digital phase plans.

3.1 Undated

3.1.1 Ditch

The terminus of one undated ditch was recorded in the southern part of the site orientated E-W. No dateable artefactual material was recovered and there were no obviously associated remains in the area.



3.2 Roman

3.2.1 Ditches

The earliest remains on the site comprise two parallel ditches. They were 4m apart and aligned N-S. They may have been part of field boundaries or wayside ditches belonging to farms or small rural settlements situated off Akeman Street, the Roman road that passed *c.* 500m north of site.

Pottery recovered from one of the ditches was identified as late Roman (3rd/4th century AD). Although no pottery was recovered from the other ditch, it was dated to the Roman period by association.

3.2.2 Residual pottery

Abraded sherds of Roman pottery were recovered from medieval layers and several medieval and post-medieval features. This background level of residual Roman pottery again suggests Roman activity in close proximity to the site.

3.3 Medieval

3.3.1 Pit

A 1.7m diameter, circular pit was recorded in the southern part of the site. Artefacts recovered from it included animal bone, fired clay and pottery. The pottery was identified as early to high medieval. This was the only feature south of the putative moat (Section 3.3.3) that dated to the medieval period.

3.3.2 Ditch

A NE-SW orientated ditch was recorded in the northern corner of site. Although no artefacts were recovered from it, the stratigraphy suggested that it was earlier than a series of bedding trenches (Section 3.5.2) and, probably, broadly contemporary with other medieval ditches in the northern part of site (Sections 3.3.3/4).

3.3.3 Moat, associated side ditches and bank

The most significant medieval feature was a 6m wide, 1.3m deep ditch. Currently, this is interpreted as the arm of a medieval moated site.

It was orientated NW to SE. There were two (side) ditches on its north-western side. These are thought to be later than the moat although the deposits within them were in the most part indistinguishable from those of the moat.

This material may have been derived from the moat or was formed in a very similar environment. Beyond these side ditches were the remnant of a bank and four more parallel ditches or gullies. These features were broadly contemporary with the moat and may have functioned as periodically re-instated, auxiliary boundaries. The ditches and gullies may also have helped drain surface water into other nearby ditches and ponds (Section 3.3.4).

Pottery sherds recovered from the ditches, gullies and lower deposits within the moat were identified as Roman and medieval. The sherds of Roman pottery were generally abraded and residual. At the south-eastern end of the moat there was an upper deposit which contained post-medieval pottery. This indicates that the moat survived as an



earthwork into the post-medieval period. This is not surprising as there are other sections of moats around the village which survive to the present-day.

Medieval moats were usually dug for symbolic reasons to demarcate manorial settlement sites. For this reason, the identification of an interior area was an important consideration. Unfortunately, the evidence from within the development area and observations made of the surrounding landscape was not conclusive. This was mainly due to the fact that only one arm of the putative moat was available for investigation.

It was hoped that the shape of the moat might help in this regard. However, its orientation did not alter significantly across the site and no entrance was revealed. Earthworks in the adjacent fields and gardens were insubstantial, and ambiguous. Therefore, no definitive statement can presently be made on the probable course of the moat beyond the limits of development area.

A remnant bank (upcast material from the ditches' creation or maintenance) was recorded on the north-eastern side of the moat. However, this does not necessarily indicate where the interior may have been located as banks around medieval moats can be situated on the inside or outside edges.

No structural features belonging to a possible manor were identified on either side of the moat. However, the majority of non-structural medieval features in the form of ditches, ponds (Section 3.3.4) and layers were to the north-east of the moat. By contrast, only one medieval feature, a circular pit (Section 3.3.1), was identified to the south.

It is worth noting that the southern half of the development area had been disproportionately affected by modern truncation associated with the modern 'White Swan' public house (Section 3.6.1).

3.3.4 Two ponds with associated ditches

Two ponds were recorded to the north-east of the moat. Beneath their infill, two pairs of ditches, perpendicular to each other, were identified.

The deposits within the ditches and the ponds were very similar in composition, suggesting they may have been in-filled at broadly the same time. It is suggested that these ponds may have begun their existence as areas of collapse caused by the regular passage of livestock drinking from the earlier ditches, rather than having been deliberately excavated. This may explain their relatively shallow, broad morphology.

Pottery recovered from the ditches and the lower deposits within the pond confirm that they were created, and at least partially in-filled, in the medieval period. Pottery recovered from the surface of the ponds included post-medieval and modern material, suggesting these features may have survived as shallow depressions beyond the medieval period.

3.3.5 Layers and possible surfaces

Several irregular patches of unshaped and unsorted limestone pieces were identified at slightly different horizons to the west of the ponds. Although, they were clearly not part of a continuous, well laid surface, they may have been the result of periodic



attempts to stabilise the ground adjacent to the ponds. Pottery sherds recovered from the surface of one of these patches dated to the medieval period.

Overlying most of the medieval remains was a dark, blue/green, clay rich layer which contained medieval and abraded Roman pottery. This was partially overlain in the northern corner of the development area by an orange/brown clay rich layer which contained medieval and transitional medieval/post-medieval pottery.

The overlying post-medieval layers were darker, more silty and probably more anthropogenic in origin.

3.4 Medieval / Post-Medieval

3.4.1 Possible structure

Part of a possible structure was recorded in the southern part of the site. It comprised a single, straight-sided slot which may have held a wooden beam. Alternatively, this may have been the remains of a robbed out wall. Early medieval and post-medieval pottery and ceramic building material were, making the dating of this feature somewhat uncertain.

3.5 Post-Medieval / Modern

3.5.1 Buildings

The sub-surface remains of three buildings were identified as having been built in this period, although they all survived into the modern period. In the north-eastern part of the area were the remains of a 17th/18th century public house, which was demolished in the 1930s.

To the south of the pub was an outbuilding believed, from anecdotal evidence, to have been used as a smithy. Although no datable artefacts were recovered from this building, the lower courses of its walls were constructed of rough hewn limestone blocks similar to those used in parts of the 17th/18th century public house.

The third building lay to the west of the 'smithy' and comprised three sides of a rectangular structure (>10m long) which is depicted on the 1st edition 25-inch OS map (1885). The walls of this building had been robbed out leaving only fragments of limestone and mortar.

3.5.2 Garden features

Several garden features were recorded outside the buildings. There were two surfaces or paths to the north-west of the 17th/18th century public house (Section 3.5.1). A further path constructed of faced limestone blocks with a rubble core was situated between the 'smithy' and the rectangular building. It may have provided a walkway to the entrance to the public house.

To the north-west of the old 'White Swan' public house were three ditches enclosing a small area of the garden with five parallel bedding trenches. This was presumably part of a cottage garden (associated with the 17th/18th century pub and visible on the 1st edition 25-inch OS map).



3.5.3 Pits

Three pits were recorded in the northern part of site. Two were relatively small in size and circular in shape. These were located in the cottage garden area (Section 3.5.2). The third was inside the long building. It was large and rectangular in plan and relatively shallow. It contained brick rubble and mortar.

3.5.4 Cess Pits

Four cess pits were recorded: two in the northern part of the development area, near the possible 'smithy'; and two in the southern part of the area, close to a linear feature (Section 3.5.5). They were all fairly similar in size, roughly rectangular in shape and contained cess deposits.

3.5.5 Ditch

A ditch ran along the south-western edge of site. It was at least 13m long and 2.5m wide. The primary deposit within it was cess. This was overlain by a thick, waterlain deposit followed by a series of dark, artefactually rich deposits, which may also have contained cess material. Artefacts recovered included ceramic, metal and glass objects, all post-medieval in date.

This feature may have served as a large ditch which was also used for cess disposal, or alternatively, may have been originally dug as a large latrine which then filled up with water.

3.5.6 Ditch terminus

A ditch terminus was recorded in the north-east of site. Medieval pottery, post-medieval pottery and roof tile were recovered from the primary deposit within it. It is unlikely that the post-medieval pottery was intrusive so it must be assumed that the medieval pottery was residual.

3.5.7 Tree-throws

Two tree-throws, 6m apart, were revealed in the northern part of site. Post-medieval artefacts were recovered from the surface of one of these, and although none was recovered from the other, their close association may indicate they were broadly contemporary.

3.6 Modern

3.6.1 Buildings

Three modern, brick-built structures were identified. The first was located close to the street frontage in the southern part of the development area. The second was located in the north-west corner of site; this was a relatively small, rectangular building of unknown function.

The third was an outbuilding which seems to have been keyed into courtyard walls at the back of the 20th-century White Swan public house.



3.6.2 Drains

Nine drains were identified as soil pipes for one or other of the modern buildings. There were also three large cylindrical brick and concrete possible soak-away structures with drain pipes leading into them.

3.6.3 Gully

A gully, aligned NE-SW was recorded in the middle of site. It was located under a modern drain which was on a similar alignment. No dateable artefactual material was recovered.

3.6.4 Pits

Two pits were recorded in the northern part of the site. Both contained modern rubbish.

4. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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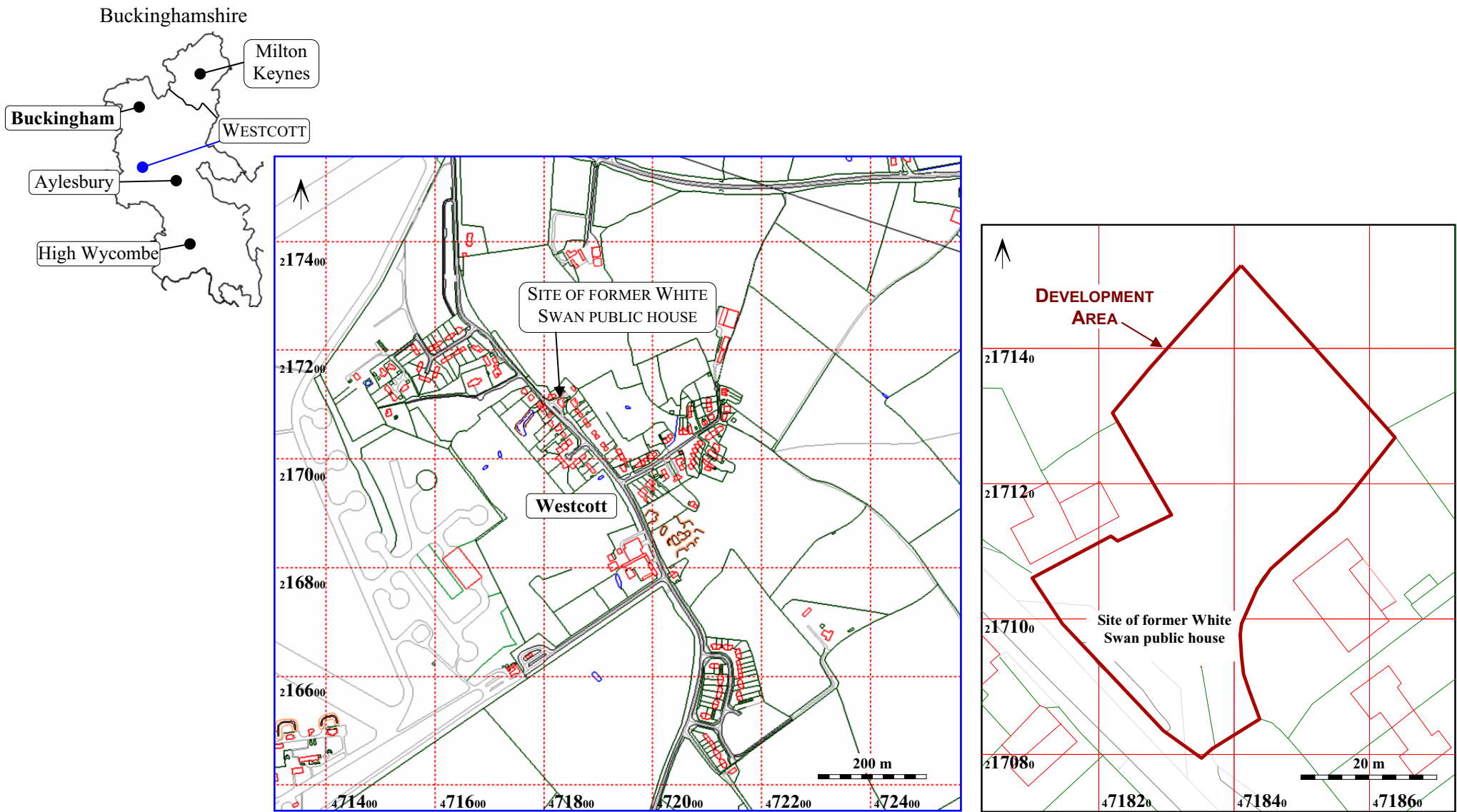


Figure 1: Site location

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