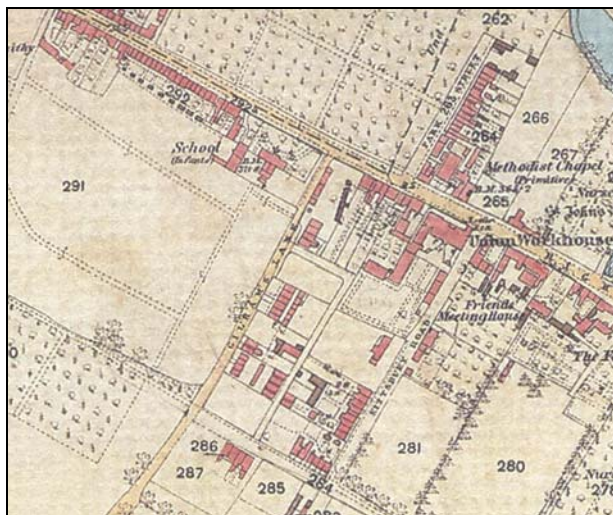




Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd

WATCHING BRIEF: 339/339A HIGH STREET BERKHAMSTED HERTFORDSHIRE

on behalf of VAH (DIY) Supplies



Jonathan R. Hunn BA PhD MIFA

March 2006

ASC: 759/BHS/02

Letchworth House
Chesney Wold, Bleak Hall,
Milton Keynes MK6 1NE
Tel: 01908 608989 Fax: 01908 605700
Email: office@archaeological-services.co.uk
Website: www.archaeological-services.co.uk



Site Data

| | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|--------------------|-----|
| <i>ASC site code:</i> | BHS | <i>Project no:</i> | 759 |
| <i>County:</i> | Hertfordshire | | |
| <i>District:</i> | Dacorum | | |
| <i>Village/Town:</i> | Berkhamsted | | |
| <i>NGR (to 8 figs):</i> | SP 98610 08105 | | |
| <i>Present land use:</i> | Commercial/residential property | | |
| <i>Planning proposal:</i> | Construction of extension to rear of properties | | |
| <i>Local Planning Authority:</i> | Hertfordshire County Council | | |
| <i>Planning application ref/date:</i> | 4/2965/04 | | |
| <i>Client:</i> | VAH (DIY) Supplies 339/339A High Street Berkhamsted Hertfordshire HP4 1AL | | |
| <i>Contact name:</i> | Peter Robertson, Robertson Associates | | |
| <i>Telephone</i> | | <i>Fax:</i> | |

Internal Quality Check

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|------------------------|------------------|--------------|--------|
| <i>Primary Author:</i> | Jonathan R. Hunn | <i>Date:</i> | 7/3/06 |
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| <i>Revisions:</i> | | <i>Date:</i> | |
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Not valid without original signature of ASC Project Director/Manager

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CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Summary | 4 |
| 1. Introduction | 4 |
| 2. Aims & Methods | 6 |
| 3. Archaeological & Historical Background | 7 |
| 4. Results. | 10 |
| 5. Conclusions | 12 |
| 6. Acknowledgements | 13 |
| 7. Archive | 13 |
| 8. References | 14 |

Appendices:

| | |
|--|----|
| 1. Monitoring & Recording sheets | 15 |
| 2. SMR Summary Sheet | 19 |

Figures:

| | |
|--|---|
| 1. General location | 3 |
| 2. Proposed plan | 5 |
| 3. Extract from Ordnance Survey 25 inch scale 1877 | 8 |

Plates:

Cover:

| | |
|--|----|
| 1. View of the site from the south west | 11 |
| 2. Detail of underpinning to the rear of existing property | 11 |
| 3. Detail of footings on northern side | 11 |
| 4. State of site from the south in late January 2006..... | 11 |
| 5. South east corner of the site..... | 11 |
| 6. South west corner of the site | 11 |

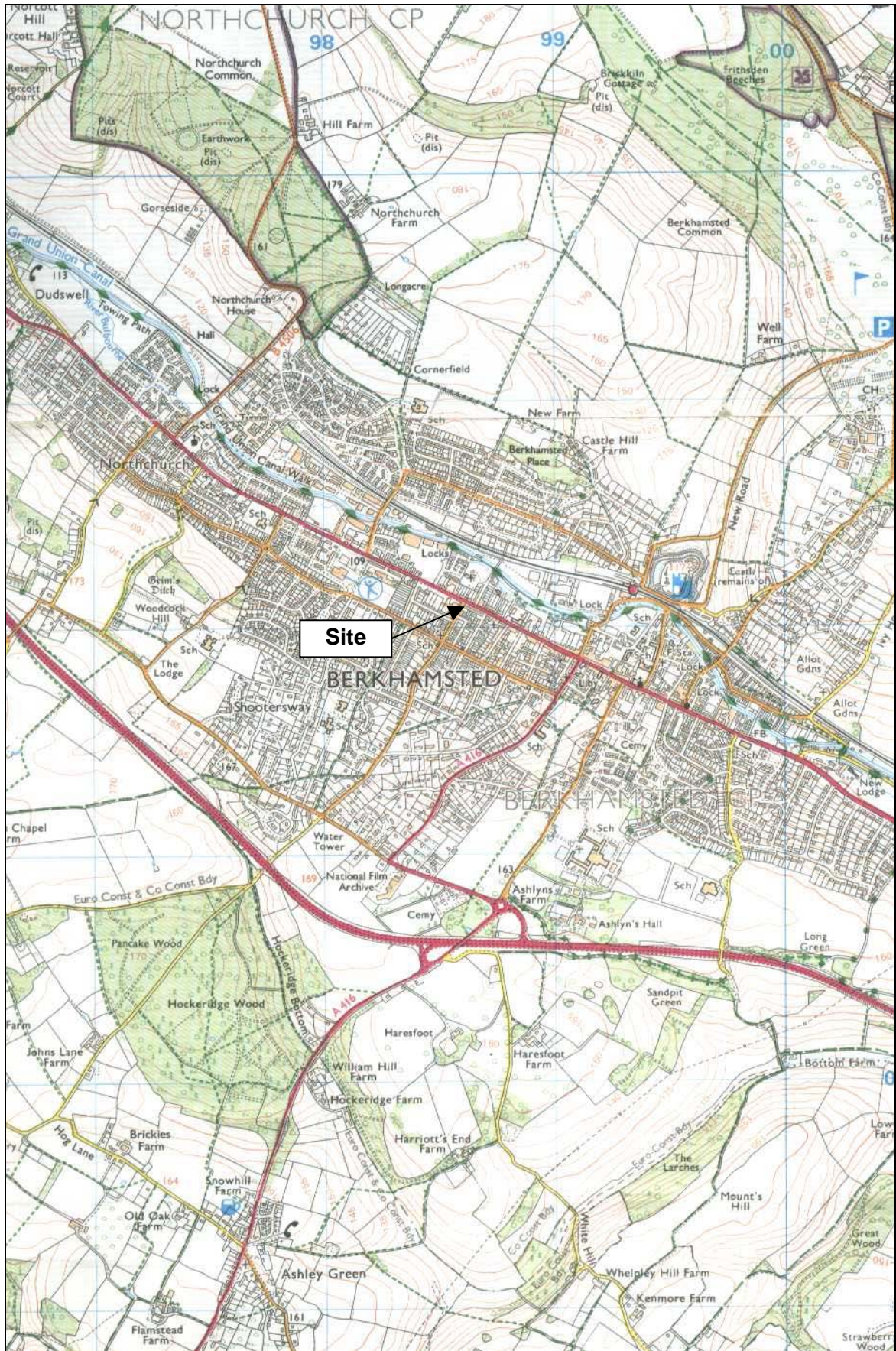


Figure 1: General location (scale 1:25,000)

Summary

In early 2006 ASC Ltd undertook an archaeological watching brief on behalf of VAH (DIY) Supplies during the construction of an extension to 339/339a High Street, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire. During the ground works phase it became apparent that one third of the site had been terraced into the slope of the land. The remaining two thirds of the site was excavated in a piecemeal manner and revealed the natural clay-with-flints subsoil. There was no activity observed that pre-dated the 20th century.

1 Introduction

1.1 During late January and February 2006 *Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd* (ASC) carried out a watching brief on a site at 339/339a High Street, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire (NGR SP 98610 08105: Fig. 1). The project was commissioned by Peter Robertson of Robertson Associates on behalf of VAH (DIY) Supplies, and was carried out according to a brief prepared on behalf of the local planning authority (LPA), *Dacorum District Council*, by their archaeological advisor (AA), *Hertfordshire County Council* (Batt 2005) and a written scheme of investigation prepared by ASC (ASC: 759/BHS/1).

1.2 Reason for Work

The area lies adjacent to an ancient thoroughfare whose re-development may have the potential to expose and damage archaeological remains on the site.

1.3 Setting

1.3.1 The site is situated in Berkhamsted in the administrative district of Dacorum, Hertfordshire (Fig. 1). It lies close to the town centre, on the south side of the High Street and is centred on (NGR) SP 98610 08105. The site is located some 20m to the rear of the High Street frontage and adjacent to Cross Oak Road. It abuts directly on an existing building built in the early 1960's and the ground was covered in hard standing. The extent of the new building is approximately 7m by 9m.

1.3.2 The site is situated in the valley of the river Bulbourne, which flows from west to east c.200m northwest of the site. The site is in an urban area and the natural soils of the site are unlikely to have survived. However, they are likely to have been derived from soils belonging to the Winchester Series which is derived from 'Clay with flints over chalk' (Avery 1964, 78-84). The terrain is gently sloping and lies at an elevation of 110m AOD.

1.3.3 There were no buildings within the area of the new extension, which consists of hard standing to the rear of the commercial property. There were buried services immediately adjacent to the existing building. Access is via Cross Oak Road to the west.

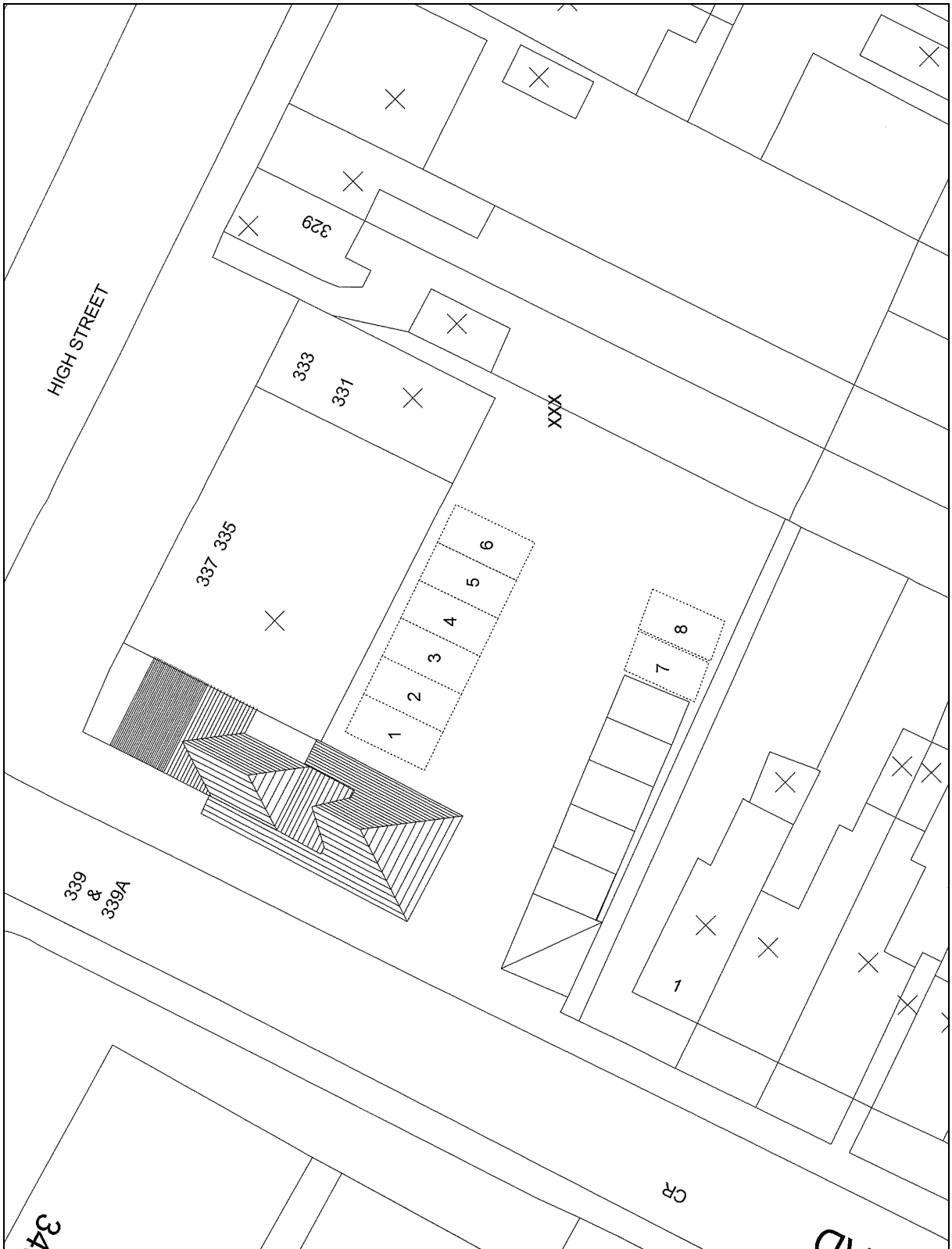


Figure 2: Proposed extension to the site (not to scale)

2 Aims & Methods

2.1 Aims

As described in the brief , the aims of the watching brief were:

- To ensure the archaeological monitoring of all aspects of the development programme likely to affect archaeological remains
- To secure the adequate recording of any archaeological remains revealed by the development programme
- To secure the analysis, conservation and long-term storage of any artefactual/ecofactual material recovered from the site.

2.2 Methods

The work was carried out according to the brief , which required:

- Soil and overburden stripping under archaeological supervision
- Inspection of sub-soil for archaeological features
- Rapid investigation and recording of any archaeological features/deposits
- Subsoil-stripping under archaeological supervision
- Examination of any service and foundation trenches and subsequent recording of any exposed archaeological deposits
- Examination of spoil heaps for archaeological material
- A programme of post-fieldwork analysis, archiving and publication

2.3 Standards

The work conforms to the project design, to the relevant sections of the Institute of Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct* (IFA 2000a), to current English Heritage guidelines (EH 1991), to the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers East of England Region *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (ALGAO 2003), and to the relevant sections of ASC's own *Operations Manual*.

3 Archaeological & Historical Background

3.1 Prehistoric (before 600BC)

The evidence for early prehistoric activity in the Berkhamsted area is not great. Until recently it consisted of only random finds, such as flint implements whose context and even their location is poorly understood. The picture has been considerably enhanced by the preliminary findings of sites along the route of the Berkhamsted by-pass. In particular, at Oakwood (NGR SP 974-072) there were 'a large number of dispersed features (pits, gullies, ditches)'; the associated finds dated to the neolithic/Bronze Age and Iron Age (McDonald 1995, 122). At Pea Lane (NGR SP 964-083) there was structural evidence and associated pottery of the later Bronze Age/Iron Age (McDonald 1995, 121-2).

Apart from the Pea Lane site mentioned above the only evidence for late Bronze Age/Iron Age activity is derived from occasional find spots. Examples include a late Bronze Age brooch from Berkhamsted castle (Branigan 1977, 174-5) and iron sword and copper alloy sheath from the cress beds at Bourne End (SMR no. 4097). There are earthwork monuments around Berkhamsted attributed to the 'prehistoric' period, but their precise date has yet to be established.

3.2 Iron Age (600BC-AD43)

For the later prehistoric and Roman periods there is a considerable body of evidence that suggests that there was dispersed occupation dating from the late Iron Age and Romano-British period along the length of the upper Bulbourne valley (Morris and Wainwright 1995, 68-75). In the middle section of the Bulbourne valley the level of activity and/or settlement is equally high.

3.3 Roman (AD43-c.450)

There is evidence for dispersed occupation during this period along the length of the upper Bulbourne valley (Morris and Wainwright 1995, 68-75). Berkhamsted's principal thoroughfare follows the course of Akeman Street which was an important communication between the Roman towns of *Verulamium* (St Alban's) and *Corinium Dubunorum* (Cirencester). The closest Roman occupation site was situated 200m to the north west of the site (SMR 6421) and the second about 500m to the north west in the Billet Lane area (SMR 6437). There is evidence for industrial activity in the form of shaft furnaces at Dellfield (SMR 4904), a pottery kiln in Bridgewater Road (SMR 6083) and one other concentration of pottery further along the same road (SMR 6071) which may or may not be another kiln. The remaining evidence is all derived from random coin loss. For example, several Roman coins came from the castle (SMR 1336), a gold coin from Meadway (SMR 6070), one from Dellfield (SMR 6076), and one from Swingate Lane (SMR 6080).

3.4 Saxon (c.450-1066)

In the late Anglo-Saxon period Berkhamsted was held by Eadmer a thane of Earl Harold. It is probable that the settlement that we call Northchurch was, at that time, a precursor of Berkhamsted (Doggett and Hunn 1985). The evidence for this comes from the fabric of St Mary's Church, otherwise known as St Mary's Berkhamsted,

which has pre-Conquest stonework in its nave walls on the western and southern sides (Taylor and Taylor 1980, 462-63; Smith 1973). With the construction of the castle in Berkhamsted some 2 kilometres to the WSW, there developed an alternative settlement focus to Northchurch.

3.5 Medieval (1066-1500)

The Domesday Book survey of 1086 mentions that *Berchehastede* was a *burbiun* (borough) whose burgesses paid £4 from tolls and held half a hide of land. The number of burgesses was 52, although this has been questioned (Doggett and Hunn 1985, 22). However, if this was accurate then it would make the borough second only after Hertford with 146 burgesses but third after St Albans whose 46 burgesses paid £11.14s from tolls. The precise limits of the Domesday borough have never been satisfactorily established. For example, it is possible that the late Anglo-Saxon 'burgh' lay towards what is now called Northchurch. However, there is a mention of land called 'Oldeburgh' in the vicinity of the old Post Office on the High Street some 100m to the west which might also indicate an earlier settlement focus. Even if this is uncertain there is no question that the post-Conquest core of medieval Berkhamsted lay along the axis of the present day High Street.

3.6 Post-Medieval (1500-1900)

The earliest representation of the town is Norden's survey of the early 17th century (PRO MR 603). This shows that settlement was located along the High Street and Castle Street. There are buildings shown in the vicinity of 339/339A High Street, albeit fairly dispersed and on too small a scale for accuracy. According to *Dury and Andrews* survey of Hertfordshire, the area looks to be devoid of occupation (Hertfordshire Record Society 2004). At the time of the Ordnance Survey plan of 1878 there are buildings in the area but not on the site of no. 339/339A (Fig: 3). The road on which the development lies was originally called 'Gilham's Lane' in 1877 but by the 2nd edition 25 inch scale Ordnance Survey map of 1898 had assumed its present name of 'Cross Oak Road'.

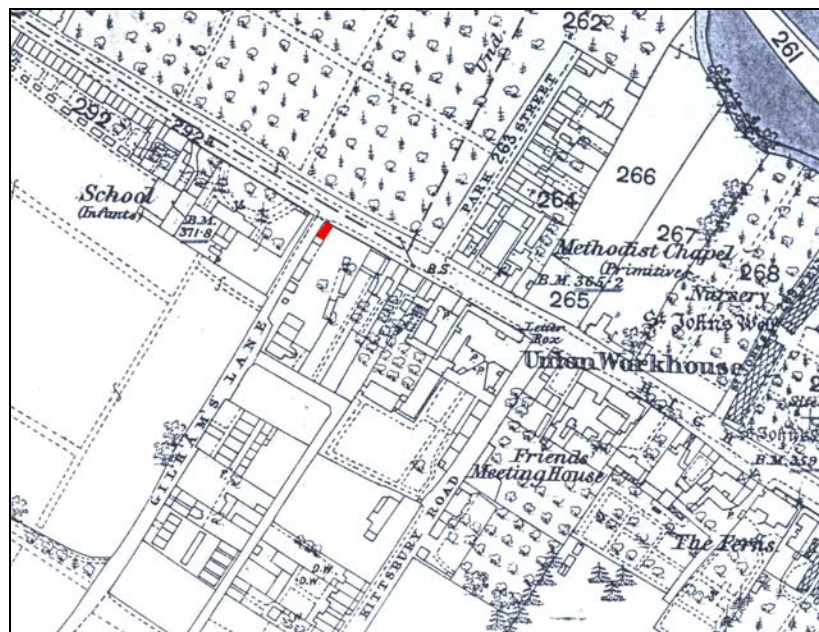


Figure 3: Extract from 1st ed. 25" scale OS plan 1877 (site shown in red)

3.7 Modern *(1900-present)*

The area continued to develop in the 20th century with more residential and horticultural buildings, in the form of greenhouses, being built. In 1938 there were no buildings fronting the High Street on the site. It was not until the second half of the 20th century that the site was developed.

4 Results

- 4.1 The area in the immediate vicinity of the existing building had been disturbed by service trenches (Plates 2 & 3). For a long time work was delayed by the need to underpin the existing foundations which went down to a depth of *c.* 4m. At no time was the site cleared of its overburden as would be the normal procedure. Half the area was cleared which revealed that some levelling had already occurred on the site. It was only comparatively late in the ground works phase that it was possible to observe the entire footprint of the proposed development. This showed that there were no obvious or significant man made features on the site (Plates 5 & 6). The spoil heaps were examined and there were no artefacts of any description found on the site.
- 4.2 As well as five visits made to the site between January 23rd and March 1st there were numerous driveby observations made by the author. The site was well observed and accordingly, there can be high degree of confidence in the results of the project.



Plate 1: View of the site from the south west



Plate 2: Detail of underpinning



Plate 3: details of footings on the north side of the existing building



Plate 4: State of site from the south (30/1/06)



Plate 5: South east corner of the site



Plate 6: South west corner of the site

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 It is unlikely that the site was ever directly occupied in the post-medieval period since there is cartographic data to support this proposition. It is less certain that this applies to the medieval period, though the balance of probability is likely to have been 'unlikely'. For earlier periods there is a suggestion, but no more than this, that settlement or activity for the late Iron Age and Roman periods is more likely to have lain closer towards the valley bottom and its adjacent spring line. Nevertheless, a recent discovery adjacent to Akeman Street at Northchurch, near the junction with New Road, indicates that industrial activity was taking place in the Roman period (Thompson *pers. com*). Accordingly, it is very difficult to propose a predictive model for early settlement in the Bulbourne valley with any degree of confidence. It is only possible to assess settlement potential in terms 'possibility' rather than 'probability'. Certain areas, such as the present development can only be classified as having once had archaeological potential, and following the present project, one may conclude that there is now no structural evidence surviving on the site predating the present day development.

6. Acknowledgements

The writer is grateful to Peter Robertson for commissioning this project on behalf of *VAH (DIY) Supplies*. Also thanks to Jason Porter the site foreman. Thanks are due to Kate Batt of the Historic Environment Section, Hertford County Council for her advice. Finally, my thanks to Bob Zeepvat of ASC Ltd for editing this report.

7. Archive

7.1 The project archive will comprise:


1. Brief
2. Project Design
3. Initial Report
4. Clients site plans
5. Site Monitoring Sheets
6. List of photographs/slides
7. CDROM with copies of all digital files.

7.2 A CD of the archive will be deposited with Dacorum Heritage Trust.

8. Bibliography

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- Taylor and Taylor 1980: *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*. Vol. 1, Cambridge University Press, (Cambridge)

Appendix 1: Monitoring Sheets

| | | | | | | |
|--|----------|---|-----------|------------------------|-----------|------------------|
|  A.S.C. LTD | | ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD MONITORING RECORD | | | | |
| Project: <i>339, High Street</i> <i>Berkhamsted, Herts</i> | | Project No/Code: <i>759 1BHS</i> | | Sheet: <i>1 of 5</i> | | |
| Client/Developer: <i>VAK Ltd.</i> | | Date of visit: <i>23/1/06</i> | | | | |
| Contact: <i>Jason</i> | | Phone: <i>07899 79110</i> | | | | |
| Duration of Visit (inc. travel): | | Start: <i>2.10pm</i> | | Finish: <i>3.05pm.</i> | | |
| Completed by: <i>Jath</i> | | | | | | |
| Development Type: | | | | | | |
| Footings <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Services | Roads | Levelling | Quarrying | Pipelines | Other (specify): |
| Site & weather conditions: <i>Dull, cold and dry.</i> | | | | | | |
| Observations: <i>The site has been partly cleared but visibility of</i> <i>Subsides is poor. Work on re-roofing Services container.</i> <i>Area beside existing building is very disturbed by Services.</i> | | | | | | |
| Comments: <i>Work may start at this stage.</i> | | | | | | |

For sketch plan, use reverse

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD MONITORING RECORD

| | | | |
|--|------------------|------------------------------|------------------|
| Project: 339, High Street | | Project No/Code: 759 1345 | Sheet: 2 of 5 |
| Berkhamsted, Herts | | Date of visit: 30/1/06 | |
| Client/Developer VAH Ltd | | | |
| Contact: Jordan | | Phone: 07899-791116 | |
| Duration of Visit (inc. travel): | Start: 9.00am | Finish: 9.55am | |
| Completed by: JRH | | | |
| Development Type: | | | |
| Footings <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Services | Roads | Levelling |
| | | | Quarrying |
| | | | Pipelines |
| | | | Other (specify): |
| Site & weather conditions: Dry & overcast. | | | |
| Observations: A deep trench on the north side of the site has been excavated (1.2 to 2.5m deep) - Natural clay only. | | | |
| Comments: The original building had to be underpinned along its entire length before the cellar could be excavated so there will be further delay to the building programme. | | | |

For sketch plan, use reverse

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD MONITORING RECORD

| | | | |
|---|-------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|
| Project: 339, High Street Berkhamsted, Herts | | Project No/Code: 759 1 BHS | Sheet: 3 of 5 |
| Client/Developer VAA Ltd | | Date of visit: 8/2/06 | |
| Contact: John | | Phone: 07899 791110 | |
| Duration of Visit (inc. travel): | Start: 1.45 pm | Finish: 2.30 pm | |
| Completed by: JRH | | | |
| Development Type: | | | |
| Footings <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Services | Roads | Levelling |
| | | | Quarrying |
| | | | Pipelines |
| | | | Other (specify): |
| Site & weather conditions: Damp & overcast | | | |
| Observations: Saw the eastern half of the footprint of the structure. No apparent sign of any features. Look entirely natural along. | | | |
| Comments: Foundation 3.8m in places - masonry masonry. | | | |

For sketch plan, use reverse

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD MONITORING RECORD

| | | | | | | |
|---|-----------------|-----------------------------|------------------|-----------|-----------|------------------|
| Project: 339, High Street | | Project No/Code: 7591BHS | Sheet: 4 of 5 | | | |
| Berkhamsted, Herts | | Date of visit: 15/2/06 | | | | |
| Client/Developer VAA Ltd | | | | | | |
| Contact: Jason | | Phone: 07899-79110 | | | | |
| Duration of Visit (inc. travel): | Start: 11.55 | Finish: 12.30 | | | | |
| Completed by: JRH | | | | | | |
| Development Type: | | | | | | |
| Footings | Services | Roads | Levelling | Quarrying | Pipelines | Other (specify): |
| Site & weather conditions: Dry and overcast | | | | | | |
| Observations: Foundations had been greatly deepened but the uphill or South Side had got to be fully cleared. Some chalk present but otherwise wholly intact except along with flints. | | | | | | |
| Comments: No pre-modern features or artifacts noted. | | | | | | |

For sketch plan, use reverse

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD MONITORING RECORD

| | | | |
|--|------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Project: 539, High Street Berkhamsted | | Project No/Code: 759 1 BHS | Sheet: 5 of 5 |
| Client/Developer VAA Ltd | | Date of visit: 1/3/06 | |
| Contact: John | Phone: 07899-741110 | | |
| Duration of Visit (inc. travel): Start: 2.35 pm | Finish: 3.05 pm | | |
| Completed by: JRA | | | |
| Development Type: | | | |
| Footings | Services | Roads | Levelling ✓ |
| | | | Quarrying |
| | | | Pipelines |
| | | | Other (specify): ground resistance |
| Site & weather conditions: Day & Sunny | | | |
| Observations: No one present on the site. Observed that the South Side (uphill) had been partially reduced by c.w. This will go deeper for the intended basement only where gravelly clay obtained. No sign of any features or artefacts present. | | | |
| Comments: Basement not to be fully excavated but the chances of anything remaining intact are remote. Therefore this Monitoring programme is now terminated. | | | |

For sketch plan, use reverse

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Appendix 2: SMR Summary Sheet

| | | |
|---|----------------|---|
| Site name and address: VAH (DIY) Supplies 339/339A High Street Berkhamsted Hertfordshire HP4 1AL | | |
| County: Hertfordshire | | District: dacorum |
| Village/Town: Berkhamsted | | Parish: St Peters (ancient parish) |
| Planning application reference: 4/2965/04 | | |
| Client name, address, & tel. no: VAH (DIY) Supplies 339/339A High Street Berkhamsted Hertfordshire HP4 1AL | | |
| Nature of application: Extension to existing building | | |
| Present land use: commercial/residential | | |
| Size of application area: n/a | | Size of area investigated: n/a |
| NGR (to 8 figures): SP 98610 08105 | | Site code: 759/BHS |
| Site director/Organization: Jonathan Hunn/ ASC Ltd | | |
| Type of work: watching brief | | |
| Date of work: | Start: 23/1/06 | Finish: 1/3/06 |
| Curating museum: Dacorum Heritage Trust | | |
| Related SMR nos: | | Periods represented: 20 th century |
| Relevant previous summaries/reports | | |
| <p>Summary of fieldwork results: <i>In early 2006 ASC Ltd undertook an archaeological watching brief on behalf of VAH (DIY) Supplies during the construction of an extension to 339/339a, High Street, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire. During the ground works phase it became apparent that one third of the site had been terraced into the slope of the land. The remaining two thirds of the site was excavated in a piecemeal manner and revealed the natural clay-with-flints subsoil. There was no activity observed that pre-dated the 20th century.</i></p> | | |
| Author: JRH | | Date: 6/3/06 |