

Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd

WATCHING BRIEF ON LAND TO THE REAR OF OVERBURNTS, CHOLESBURY, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

on behalf of Mr Peter Windus



Nicholas A Crank BSc AIFA

October 2004

ASC: 608/COB/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>	COB	<i>Project no:</i>	608
<i>County:</i>	Buckinghamshire		
<i>District:</i>	Chiltern District		
<i>Village/Town:</i>	Cholesbury		
<i>Parish:</i>	Cholesbury cum Leonards CP		
<i>NGR:</i>	SP 9309 0719		
<i>Present land use:</i>	Paddock		
<i>Planning proposal:</i>	Extension of existing stable block		
<i>Extent of development:</i>	c.8m x c.3.6m		
<i>Planning application ref:</i>	04/1012		
<i>Client:</i>	Mr Peter Windus Overburnts Cholesbury Nr Tring HP23 6ND		
<i>Telephone</i>			

Internal Quality Check

<i>Primary Author:</i>	Nicholas A Crank	<i>Date:</i>	1 st October 2004
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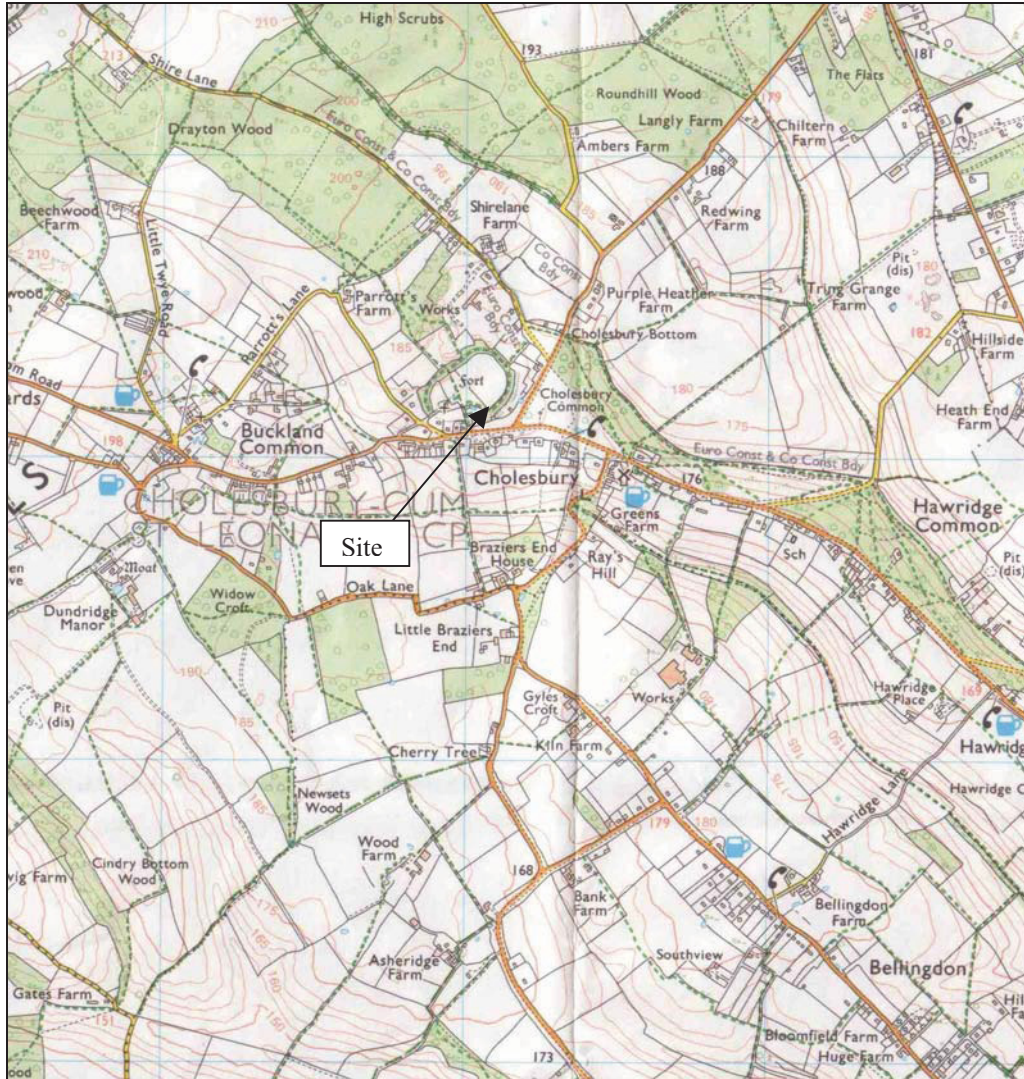


Figure 1: General location (scale 1:25,000)

Summary

During September 2004 Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd (ASC) carried out a watching brief on a site at Overburnts, Cholesbury, Buckinghamshire (NGR SP 9309 0719, Fig. 1). The watching brief was conducted during excavations for the foundations of an extension to an existing stable block. The work was required as the development is located within Cholesbury Camp, a large multivallate hillfort. No archaeological features were observed during the watching brief. However an area of disturbed ground probably related to archaeological excavations conducted in 1932 was revealed, in addition to two modern service runs.

1 Introduction

1.1 During September 2004 *Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd (ASC)* carried out a watching brief on a site at Overburnts, Cholesbury, Buckinghamshire (NGR SP 9309 0719, Fig. 1). The project was commissioned by Mr Peter Windus, and was carried out according to a brief prepared by Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service (BCAS) on behalf of the local planning authority (LPA), Chiltern District Council (planning ref. 04/1012), and a written scheme of investigation prepared by ASC (Crank 2004). The project also complied with recommendations from Christopher Welch, English Heritage Inspector of Ancient Monuments, South East Region.

1.2 *Reason for Work*

Planning Policy Guidance note 16 (PPG16) states that where a planning authority has decided to permit a development which could destroy archaeological remains it may satisfy itself before granting planning permission that the developer has made appropriate and satisfactory provision for archaeological recording and publication of the results. The work was required as part of a ‘negative condition’ on the planning consent for the development under the procedures outlined in PPG16. The site is situated within Cholesbury Camp, a large multivallate hillfort and a Scheduled Monument (SAM No. 27161) and Scheduled Monument Consent was also secured prior to works commencing.

1.3 *Setting*

1.3.1 The site is situated in Cholesbury village which is *c.*4km south of Tring. The site consists of a *c.*1.5 ha ‘D-shaped’ paddock containing a single stable block. The paddock is defined by and occupies the eastern half of Cholesbury Camp, a large multivallate hillfort (SAM No. 27161, Fig.1).

1.3.2 Soils on the site are those of the *Batcombe Association*, defined as ‘fine silty over clayey and fine loamy over clayey soils... Some well drained clayey soils over chalk’. The underlying geology is defined as ‘plateau drift and clay-with-flints’ (Soil Survey 1983). The site occupies a level area within the hill fort at an elevation of *c.*190m AOD. The surrounding area is characterised by the hilly rolling landscape of the Chilterns (Fig. 1).

- 1.3.3 The site is currently occupied by a modern stable block. Access is via a gate in the southern corner of the paddock. The area of development crosses a service trench excavated in 1997 (Figs. 2 & 3).

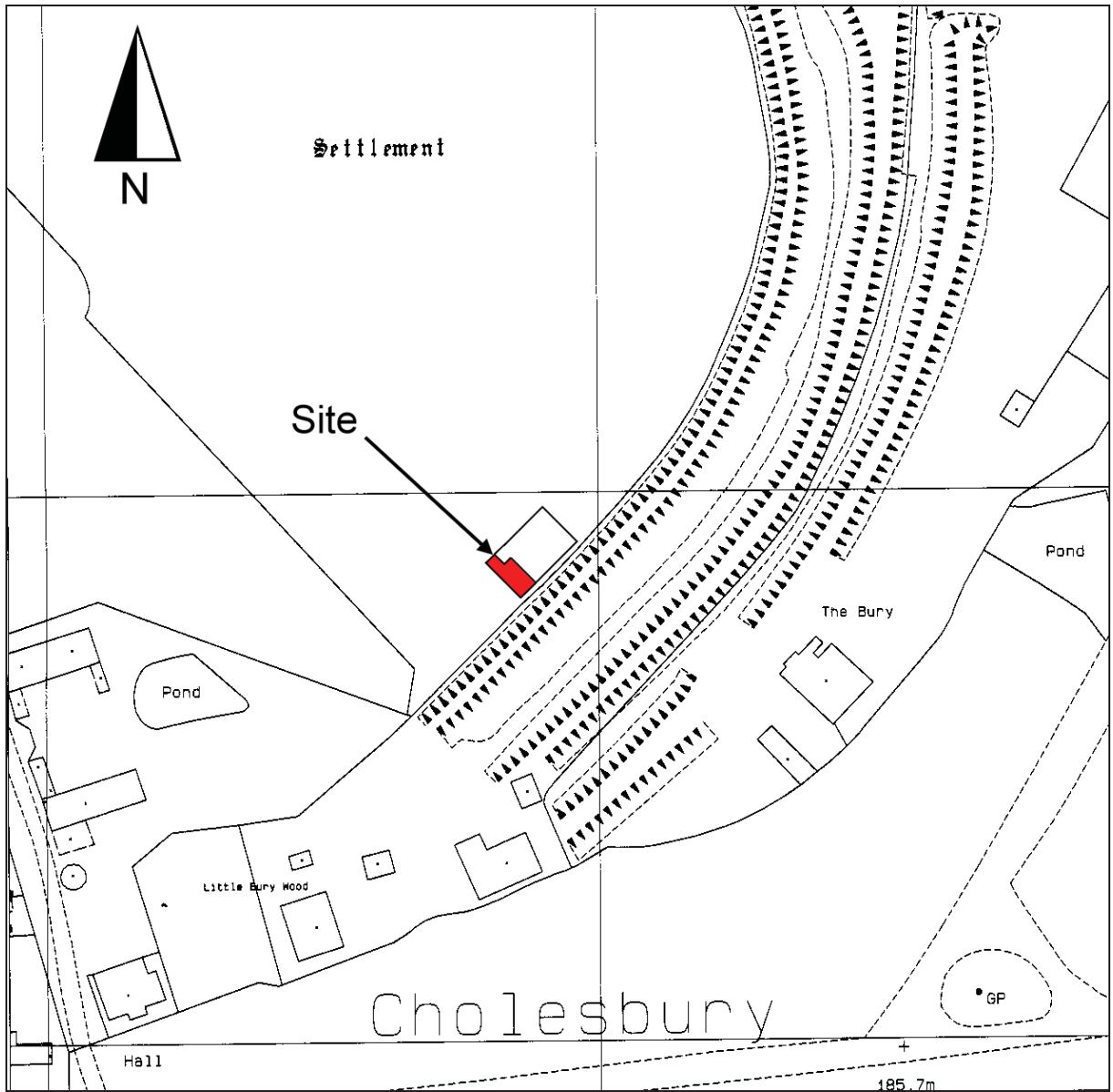


Figure 2: Site plan (scale 1:1250)

2 Aims & Methods

2.1 Aims

In line with the requirements of the Brief, the aims of the watching brief were:

- To identify and record any archaeological remains revealed by the groundworks.
- Particular attention will be paid to the potential for traces of Iron Age or Medieval activity within the hill fort.
- Specific attention will be paid to the potential for deposits relating to metalworking activity.
- In the event of metalworking deposits being encountered advice on sampling will be sought from the English Heritage Regional Science Advisor.

2.2 Methods

In line with the requirements of the Brief, the methods adopted for this project were:

- To undertake a ‘detailed’ watching brief, in which an archaeologist will be present during all works which may affect archaeological remains.
- The watching brief will focus on the stripping of the c.8m x c.3.6m area of the extension to the stable (Fig. 3). In line with the Scheduled Monument Consent the stripping will not exceed a depth of 200mm.
- A record will be made of the extent and depth of any previous ground disturbance. Any archaeological features will be cleaned and sampled sufficiently to demonstrate their general date and character, and then recorded and planned appropriately.
- In the event of an “unexpected discovery” being made works will cease, English Heritage, the County Archaeological Service and the developer will be informed as soon as possible. Initially consideration will be given to preservation *in-situ* but if this is not practical then such discoveries may give rise to a salvage excavation funded from the contingency.

2.3 Standards

The work conforms to the project design, to the requirements of the *Brief*, to the relevant sections of the Institute of Archaeologists’ *Standard & Guidance Notes* (IFA 2001) and *Code of Conduct* (IFA 2000a), and to the relevant sections of ASC’s own *Operations Manual*.

3 Archaeological & Historical Background

- 3.1 The following paragraphs provide a summary of the archaeological and historical background to the site. Cholesbury is an area of considerable archaeological interest, but the focus of attention lies with a major Iron Age hillfort, known as *Cholesbury Camp* (Scheduled Ancient Monument 27161), within which the present development is located.

SMR = Sites and Monuments Record number

3.1.1 *Early Prehistoric*

A number of prehistoric finds have been recorded close to the site. They comprise stray artefacts and include an ovoid flint axe with an acheulian biface found to the west of the site (SMR 1229). A fragment from a Bronze Age flat axe (SMR 2297) was found on the south side of Cholesbury Lane, to the southwest of the site.

3.1.2 *Later prehistoric*

Cholesbury was of significant importance during the Iron Age, being dominated by the major hillfort now known as Cholesbury Camp. The fort is oval in plan and measures c.310 x 230m, covering an area of c.6ha including the ditch and ramparts. A section through the inner ditch was excavated at the Old Vicarage in 2002 and was shown to be in excess of 1.2m deep (Lightfoot 2002). A geophysical survey of the interior of the hillfort was recently undertaken by John Gover (2000), who noted ‘few probable Iron Age structures’ and ‘medieval domestic occupation’.

The development site is situated within the eastern half of the fort, immediately to the northwest of its ramparts. A watching brief was conducted during the groundworks for the existing stable and its services in 1997. This revealed two possible hearths (one associated with ironworking), which were undated due to a lack of finds (BCMAS 1997). In 1932 excavations within the ramparts revealed the remains of hearths, an oven and iron smelting activity (Kimball, 1933). The northeastern end of trench L from the 1932 excavations directly abuts the present stable block and coincides with the proposed development area. This part of the trench contained three hearths and a small beehive-shaped oven. Two of the hearths contained iron slag and the third contained fire cracked flints and sherds of 2nd century BC pottery (BCMS 1997).

The Iron Age linear earthwork known as ‘Grims Ditch’ passes 2km to the northeast. Grims Ditch is a name given to a number of linear earthworks in the area and the name probably originated from the belief that they were constructed by the god Odin, *Grima* in Old English meaning ‘masked person’ being a synonym for the god (Berresford Ellis 1991, 111).

3.1.3 *Saxon and medieval*

Little is known of the origin of the village of Cholesbury. It was not mentioned in the Domesday survey, though it is assumed to be included under '*Driatone*', modern Drayton Beauchamp (Page 1925, 334). Historically the parish of Cholesbury was connected with Drayton Beauchamp, forming a narrow strip of land lying between the hundred of Aylesbury and Hertfordshire.

The name place name *Cholesbury* is likely to derive from the Old English *Ceolweald's Burg* a reference to the fort, though it is referred to as '*Chelwoldsesbur*' in the 'Valuations of Norwich in 1254 and *Chelewoldesbyr* in the Assize Rolls of 1266.

There is little evidence for the condition of the fort during the medieval period but the ditches may have remained partially open. Excavation through the upper fills of the ditch at the Old Vicarage revealed 19th century pottery sherds (Lightfoot 2002). A small assemblage of residual medieval pottery was also present, indicating that the upper part of the ditch profile may have been filling during the 19th century.

4 Results (Figs. 3 & 4)

- 4.1 The area of the proposed extension was stripped of topsoil to a depth of 200mm under close archaeological observation. The excavated spoil was scanned for finds and the area was subsequently hand cleaned to aid the recognition of archaeological features.
- 4.2 No archaeological features were observed within the cleaned area but a modern soakaway and connecting drain run, in addition to a known modern service trench were revealed. The underlying natural subsoil, a light yellowish brown silty clay was exposed in an isolated area to the east of the drain run. The larger portion of the area observed appeared disturbed and comprised a mixed deposit composed of topsoil and redeposited natural clay.
- 4.3 A single fragment of iron tap slag (25g) was recovered during hand cleaning of the area.

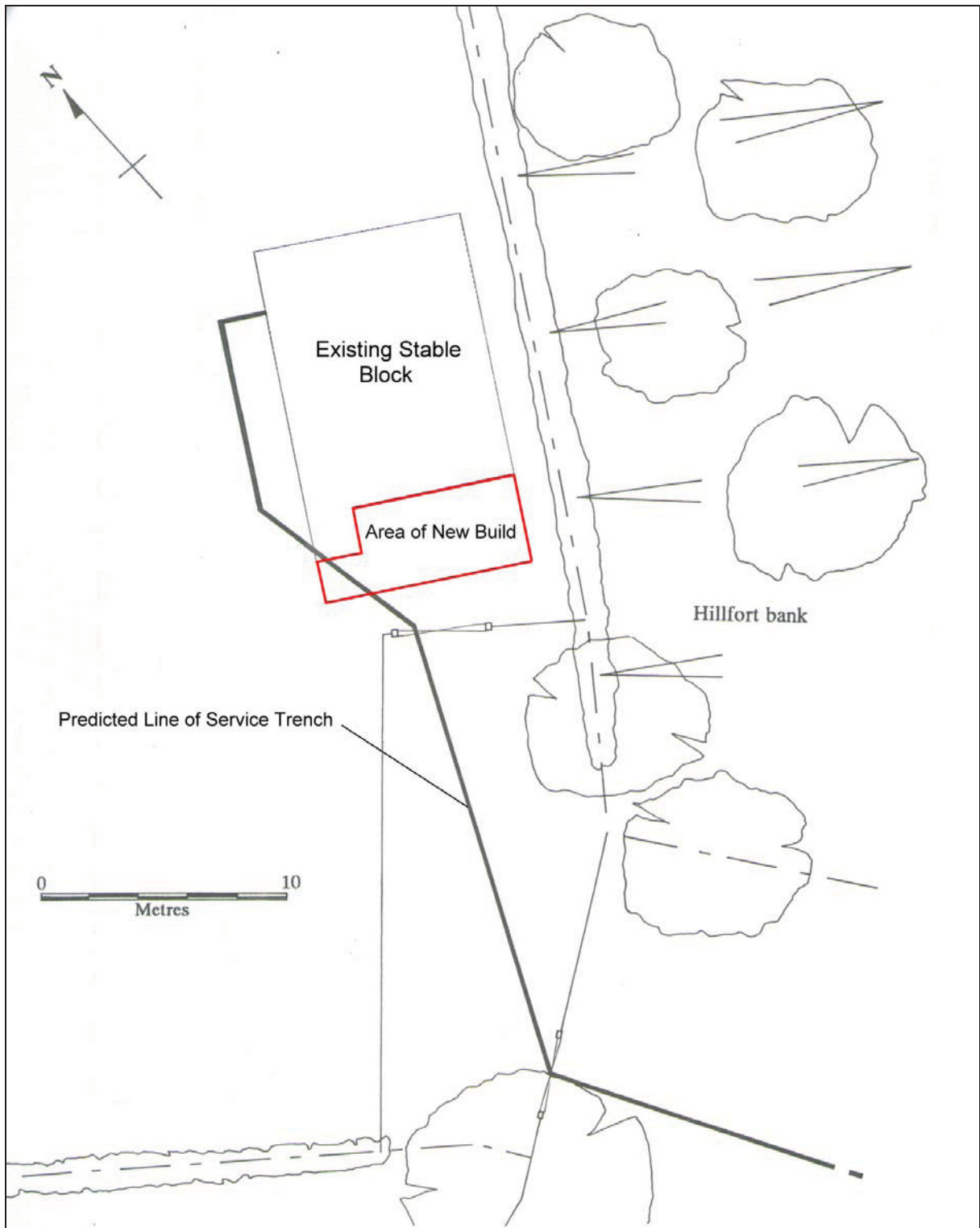


Figure 3: Area of Observation (scale 1:200)

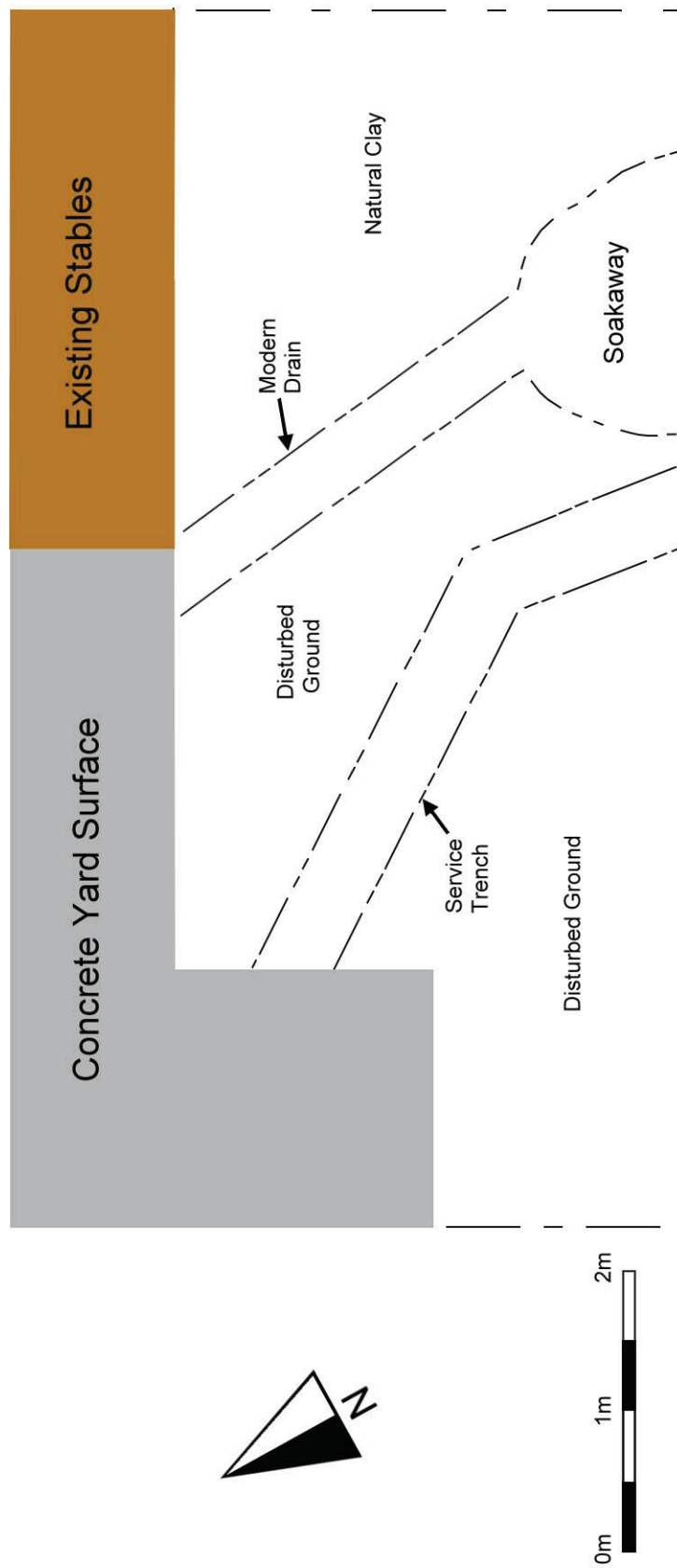


Figure 4: Plan of Area Observed (scale 1:50)



Plate 1: Area Observed facing Northwest



Plate 2: Area Observed facing Northwest



Plate 3: Area Observed facing Southeast

5. Conclusions (Fig. 4)

- 5.1 No archaeological features were observed during the course of the watching brief. The larger western part of the area observed appeared to have been subject to considerable disturbance beyond that caused by the two distinct modern service runs. Relatively undisturbed natural clay was revealed at the eastern end of the area but despite hand cleaning no archaeological features were observed. However a single fragment of iron tap slag was recovered during hand cleaning of this area.
- 5.2 As stated above (section 3.1.2) the area of the watching brief coincides with Kimball's 1932 excavation trench in which three hearths and a small beehive-shaped oven were revealed in addition to iron slag and Iron Age pottery. No trace of these remains was observed during the watching brief and it seems reasonable to conclude that the disturbance observed at the western end of the area may represent backfilling of the truncation resulting from this earlier archaeological investigation.

6. Acknowledgements

The writer is grateful to Mr Peter Windus for commissioning and funding the project and for his on site assistance and hospitality.

The input and advice of Mr David Radford of BCAS and Mr Christopher Welch of English Heritage is also acknowledged.

7. Archive

7.1 The project archive will comprise:

1. Brief
2. Project Design
3. Clients site plans
4. Site records
5. Finds records
6. Finds
7. Site record drawings
8. List of photographs/slides
9. B/W prints & negatives
10. CDROM with copies of all digital files.

7.2 The archive will be deposited with Buckinghamshire County Museum, ref. 2005.12.

8. Bibliography

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Appendix 1: Finds Concordance

Context	Pottery		Bone		Flint (no)	Shell (g)	Stone (no)	Other Finds	
	(no)	(g)	(no)	(g)				Type	(no)
Unstrat	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Iron tap slag	1 (25g)

Appendix 2: Field Monitoring Record

A.S.C. LTD		ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD MONITORING RECORD				
Project: OVERBURNTS, CHOLESBURY, BUCKS		Project No/Code: 6081 COR		Sheet: 1 of 1		
Client/Developer: PETER WINDUS		Date of visit: 20/9/04				
Contact:		Phone: 01494 758428				
Duration of Visit (inc. travel):	Start: 10.00 am	Finish: 3.00 pm				
Completed by: N.A. CRANK.						
Development Type:						
Footings <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Services	Roads	Levelling	Quarrying	Pipelines	Other (specify):
Site & weather conditions: GENERALLY GOOD, COOL, SOME LIGHT RAIN.						
Observations: AREA 8.6m x 3.6m STRIPPED (-1.8sqm square in NW CORNER) TO DEPTH OF c. 200mm - PRIOR TO CASTING OF CONCRETE SLAB FOR STABLE EXTENSION. NATURAL LIGHT YELLOWISH BROWN SILTY CLAY EXPOSED AT SE END OF STRIP - SOME PROB. ROOTING BUT NO FEATURES OBSERVED DESPITE HAND CLEANING OF WHOLE AREA. A MODERN DRAIN AND SOAKAWAY PRESENT, ALSO A PROB. SERVICE TRENCH. AREA TO NW OF DRAIN DISTURBED AND NATURAL NOT REVEALED. (SEE PLAN). SINGLE PIECE OF IRON TAP SLAG RECOVERED DURING CLEANING.						
Comments: NO FEATURES REVEALED - MAY BE DUE TO DISTURBANCE FROM 1930s EXCAVATION TRENCH, OR JUST LIMITED DEPTH OF STRIP.						

For sketch plan, use reverse

SEE SEPARATE MEASURED PLAN. ©ASC, 2003