

Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION:
1 BILLET LANE:
BERKHAMSTED, HERTFORDSHIRE**

on behalf of Mark Verney Esq



Jonathan R Hunn BA PhD MIFA

April 2004

ASC: 565BBL/2

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>	BBL	<i>Project no:</i>	565
<i>SMR reference / Event No:</i>	TBD		
<i>County:</i>	Hertfordshire		
<i>District:</i>	Dacorum		
<i>Village/Town:</i>	Berkhamsted		
<i>Parish:</i>	Berkhamsted St Marys aka Northchurch		
<i>NGR:</i>	SP 89229-08429		
<i>Extent of site:</i>	23m x 10m max.		
<i>Present land use:</i>	Garage and garden		
<i>Planning proposal:</i>	New dwelling		
<i>Extent of development:</i>	6m x 12m		
<i>Planning application ref/date:</i>	4/0129/04		
<i>Client:</i>	Mark Verney Esq, Concord, Shire Lane, Cholesbury, Bucks, HP23 6NA		
<i>Contact name:</i>	Mark Verney		
<i>Telephone</i>	07778-296200	<i>Fax:</i>	

Internal Quality Check

<i>Primary Author:</i>	Jonathan R. Hunn	<i>Date:</i>	23/4/04
<i>Edited/Checked By:</i>		<i>Date:</i>	
<i>Revisions:</i>		<i>Date:</i>	
<i>Edited/Checked By:</i>		<i>Date:</i>	

© Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd

No part of this document is to be copied in any way without prior written consent.

Every effort is made to provide detailed and accurate information. However, Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd cannot be held responsible for errors or inaccuracies within this report.

© Ordnance Survey maps reproduced with the sanction of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

ASC Licence No. AL 100015154

CONTENTS

Summary	6
1. Introduction	6
2. Aims & Methods	7
3. Archaeological & Historical Background	8
4. Results.	9
5. Conclusions	12
6. Acknowledgements	13
7. Archive	13
8. References	14

Appendices:

1. Trench Summary Table	15
2. SMR Summary Sheet	16

Figures:

1. General location	3
2. Site plan	4
3. Trench location plan	5

Plates:

Cover: View of site during evaluation phase

1. Detail of trial trench looking north.....	11
2. Oblique view of trial trench.....	11

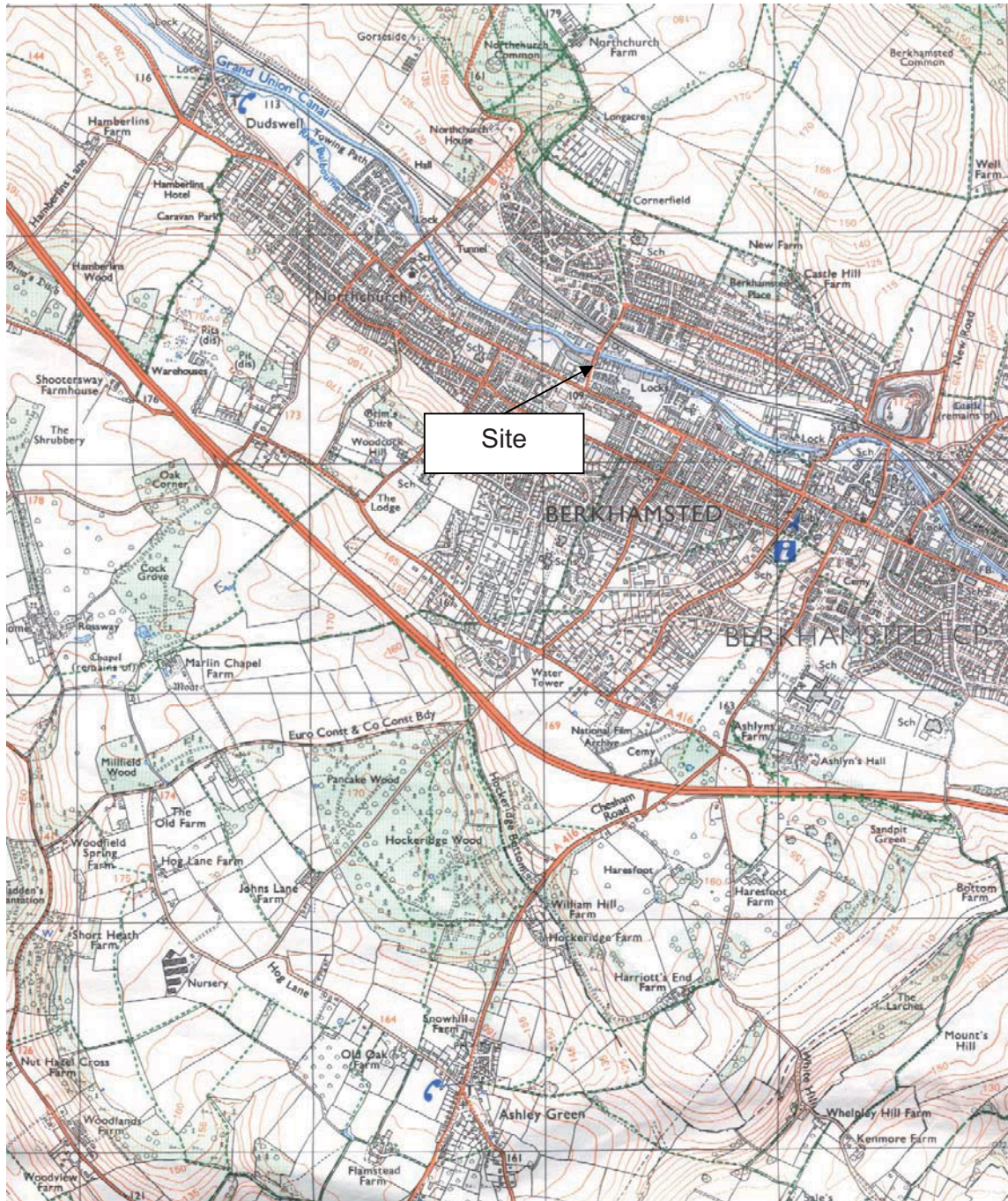


Figure 1: General location (scale 1:25,000)

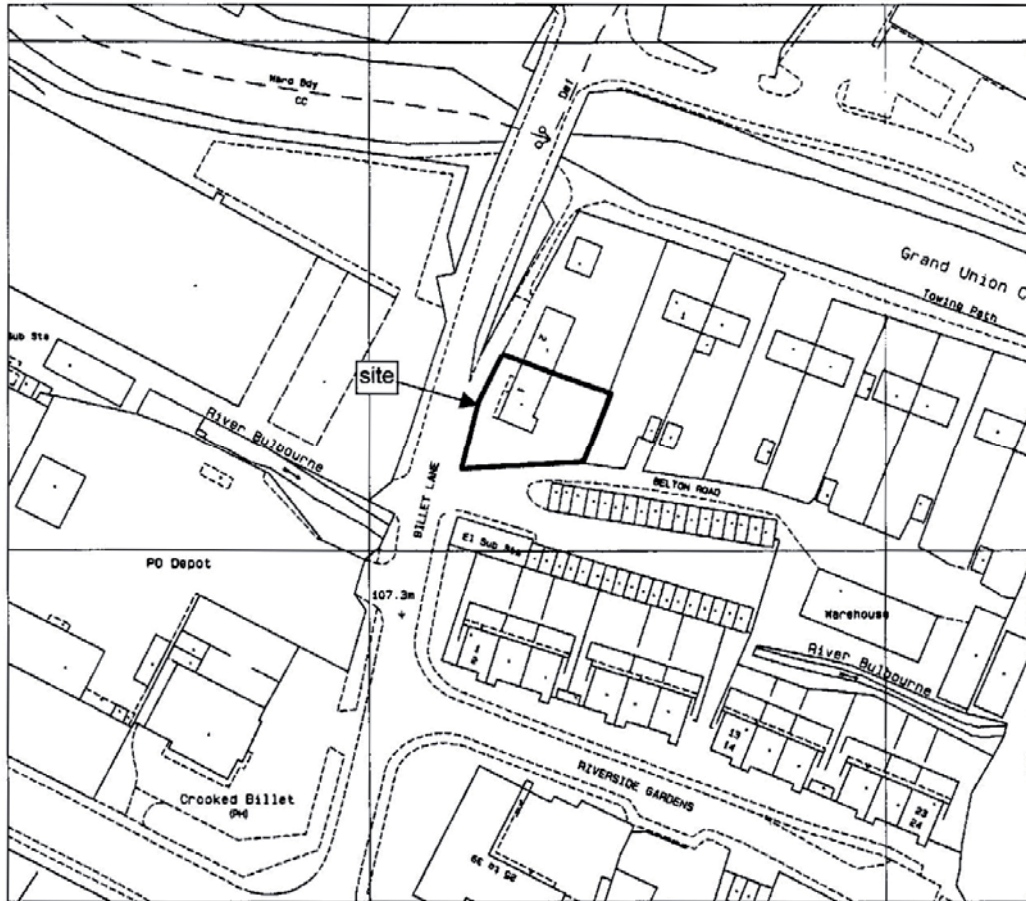


Figure 2: Site plan (scale 1:1250)

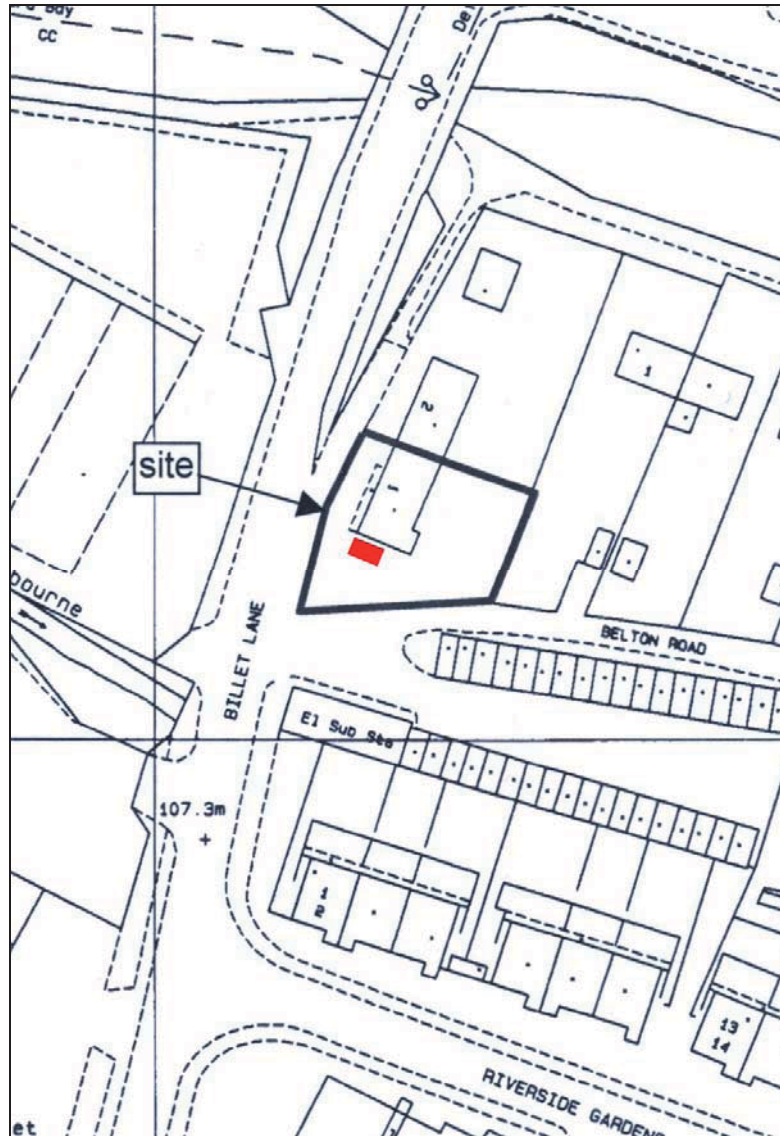


Figure 3: Trench location plan (not to scale)

Summary

In the spring of 2004 Archaeological Services & Consultancy undertook an evaluation within the messuage of 1 Billet Lane, Berkhamsted. A single trench was excavated within the footprint of the proposed building which confirmed that the site stood on de-calcified, chalky alluvium, which in turn overlay fluvio-glacials. No archaeological deposits or artefacts were present on the site.

1 Introduction

1.1 During mid April 2004 *Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd* (ASC) carried out an evaluation on a site at 1 Billet Lane, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire (NGR SP 89229-08429: Fig. 1). The project was commissioned by Mark Verney, and was carried out according to a brief (Batt 2004) prepared by the County Archaeology Office, Hertford, and a written scheme of investigation prepared by ASC (ASC: 565BBL/1).

1.2 *Reason for Work*

The proposed development falls within an area of potential archaeological remains and environmental deposits.

1.3 *Setting*

1.3.1 The site lies towards the north western side of the town of Berkhamsted at the junction of Billet Lane with Belton Road; it also lies between the river Bulbourne the south and the Grand Union canal to the north. The development area (400 sq. m approx) consists of a garage and garden defined by a wooden fence fronting Billet Lane and a privet hedge adjacent to Belton Road (unadopted)

1.3.2 The site lies within the former flood plain of the river Bulbourne which flows in a south easterly direction some 20m to the south. The terrain is flat and lies at an elevation of *c. 107m AOD*). The unmodified soils, where they exist, are classified as belonging to the Gade Complex which is derived from mixed alluvium over chalk. These consist of *'well defined, dark-coloured A horizons containing moderate to high amounts of organic matter. The sub-soils consist of interstratified beds of water-laid flint or chalk gravel, loam and chalky silt, with occasional peaty layers, forming an intricate pattern which is often related to minor differences in level, the gravels forming low terraces or levees raised a few feet above the lowest ground'* (Avery 1964, 102).

1.3.3 Access is gained from Billet lane to the west. There is a brick garage to the north and only over head telephone cables also to the north.

2 Aims & Methods

2.1 Aims

As described in the brief (Section 3), the aims of the evaluation were:

- The aims of the evaluation were to consider the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains which were liable to be threatened by the proposed development.
- To provide an assessment of the regional context within which any archaeological evidence rests.
- To highlight any regional research priorities relevant to any further investigation of the site as set out in *Research and Archaeology: A framework for the Eastern Counties. 2. Research agenda and strategy*.

2.2 Methods

The work was carried out according to the brief (Section 4), which required:

- Excavation of a trial trench within the footprint of the proposed building and access
- The trench is to be 1.5 – 2m wide and 10m in length

2.3 Standards

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

3 Archaeological & Historical Background

3.1 Prehistoric *(before 600BC)*

The evidence for early pre-historic 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. For example, 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 250m to the east of the site (SMR 6421) and a second site lay less than 200m to the north east near the railway line (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, an earlier precursor of Berkhamsted (Doggett and Hunn 1985). The evidence for this comes from the fabric of St Mary's church, other wise 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 burbium (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 has 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 100 m 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 no buildings shown in the vicinity of the 1, Billet Lane. According to *Dury and Andrews* survey of Hertfordshire, the area is shown as being fields. (Dury & Andrews 1768). The area remained unbuilt until the 20th century.

3.7 Modern (1900-present)

The site was not built on until after World War II and apart from the garage, which was built in the 1960's, the site has remained as garden ever since.

4 Results

- 4.1 Due to the need to minimise the impact of the evaluation, the trench was laid out to meet the constraints of the site. It was 5m long (east-west) and had a maximum width of 3.5m (Fig. 3). Once the natural horizons were identified the trench was greatly reduced in size and a single pit (1.5m x 1.7m) dug at its western end (see sketch on trench record sheet).
- 4.2 There was a thick layer of dark brown topsoil across the site some 0.8m deep. This rested on a thin layer of re-deposited, yellowish brown clay [2a] (Mun 10YR 5/4) about 0.05m thick. Beneath this was a brown, stony deposit (Mun 10 YR 5/3) c. 0.2m thick [2]. This in turn, overlay a greyish brown silty horizon [3] (Mun 10YR 5/2) which was approximately 0.25m thick. This overlay a layer of pale brown (Mun 10 YR 6/3), flinty gravel [4] some 0.25m thick. Below this was the natural chalk at a depth of 1.55m below the present day ground level.
- 4.3 No pre-modern artefacts were observed in the top-soil nor were any man made features, apart from the edge of a soakaway observed.

Photographic Plates



Plate 1: View of trench looking northwards



Plate 2: Oblique of trial trench

5. Conclusions

- 5.1.1 The evidence suggests that the site and its immediate area remained undisturbed for most of its history. Its proximity to the river Bulbourne also indicates that it likely to have been used as pasture since first cleared in the Neolithic period, if not earlier. Although no peat deposits were found the presence of a greyish brown silty layer [3] could well represent an horizon of de-composed peat. The silt lies immediately above the greyish, flinty gravel and probably represents a stage when the volume of water passing along the Bulbourne valley greatly decreased in the later post-glacial period.
- 5.2 Immediately below the organic layer [1] was a deposit of re-deposited clay [2a] and this may have been derived from the digging of the canal at the end of the 18th century. All the horizons below this layer are derived from natural formation processes
- 5.2 The proposed development is unlikely to encounter any significant archaeological deposits. To what extent this interpretation is applicable to the surrounding area remains unknown

6. Acknowledgements

The writer is grateful to Mark Verney for commissioning this project and to the present occupiers, Mr & Mrs Ken Norwood for their co-operation and hospitality. Thanks are also due to Kate Batt of the County Archaeology Office, Hertford for her advice and participation during the course of the project.

7. Archive

7.1 The project archive will comprise:

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

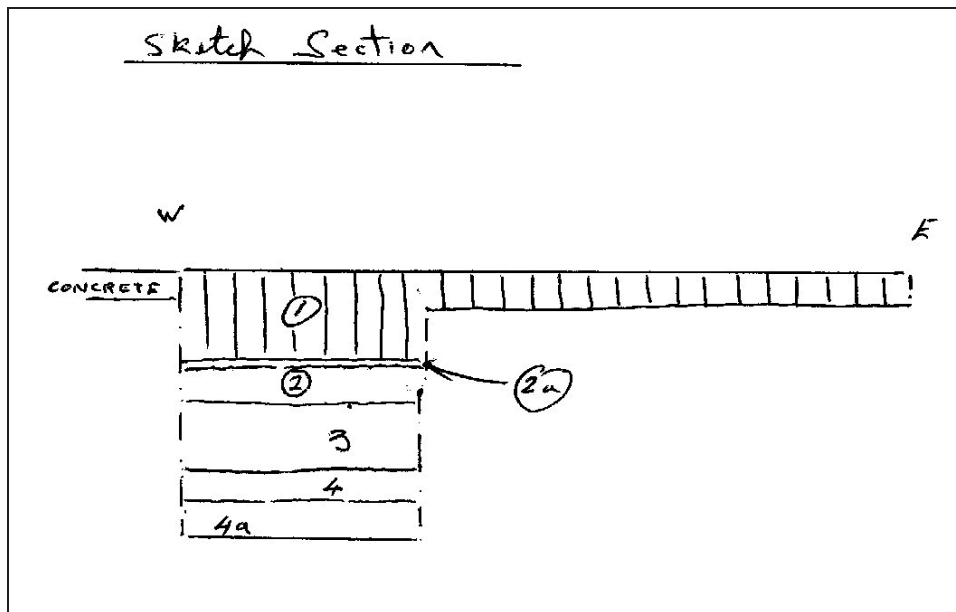
7.2 The archive will be deposited with the Dacorum Heritage Trust.

8. Bibliography

- Avery, B. W. 1964: *The Soils and Land Use of the District around Aylesbury and Hemel Hempstead*. London. HMSO.
- Branigan, K. 1977: A Prehistoric Brooch from Berkhamsted. *Hertfordshire Archaeology* vol 4, 1974-76.
- Doggett, N and Hunn, J. 1985: The Origins and Development of Medieval Berkhamsted, in *Hertfordshire's Past* no. 18, 18-36.
- Dury, A. & Andrews, J. 1768: *A Topographical map of Hartford-shire*. Hertfordshire Publications 1980.
- EH 1991 *The Management of Archaeological Projects, 2nd edition*. English Heritage (London).
- Ferguson L.M. & Murray D.M. 1997 *Archaeological Documentary Archives: Preparation, Curation and Storage*. Institute of Field Archaeologists' Paper 1 (Manchester).
- IFA 2000a Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct*.
- IFA 2000b Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Code of Approved Practice for the Regulation of Contractual Arrangements in Field Archaeology*.
- IFA 2001 Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard & Guidance documents (Desk-Based Assessments, Watching Briefs, Evaluations, Excavations, Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings, Finds)*.
- McDonald, T. 1995: The A41 Project. Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust. Holgate (ed) *Chiltern Archaeology: Recent work*, 68-75. The Book Castle. Dunstable
- Morris, M and Wainwright, A. 1995: Iron Age and Romano-British settlement, agriculture and industry in the upper Bulbourne valley, Hertfordshire: an interim interpretation, in Holgate (ed) *Chiltern Archaeology: Recent work*, 68-75. The Book Castle. Dunstable.
- Smith, T. P. 1973: *The Anglo-Saxon Churches of Hertfordshire*. Phillimore. Chichester.
- Soil Survey 1983 *1:250,000 Soil Map of England and Wales, and accompanying legend* (Harpenden).
- Taylor and Taylor 1980: *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*. Vol. 1, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Appendix 1: Trench

Trench					
		Max Dimensions			
		Width	3.5m	Depth	1.8m
		Length 5m			
		m OD			
		NGR Co-ordinates			
		SP 89229 08429			
Orientation		East-west			
Reason for Trench					
Context	Type	Description and Interpretation	Max Thickness (mm)	Depth BGL (mm)	
1	layer	topsoil	0.8m		
2a		Yellowish brown clay	0.05m		
2		Brown stoney deposit	0.2m		
3		Greyish brown deposit	0.25		
4		Pale brown flinty gravel	0.25		
4a		chalk	Below 1.55m		



Appendix 2: SMR Summary Sheet

HERTS

Site name and address: 1 Billet Lane, Berkhamsted,		
County: Herts		District: Dacorum
Village/Town: Berkhamsted		Parish: St Marys
Planning application reference: 4/0129/04		
Client name, address, and tel. no.: Mark Verney , Concord, Shire Lane, Cholesbury, Bucks, HP23 6NA		
Nature of application: new dwelling		
Present land use: garage and garden		
Size of application area: 23m x 10m max.		Size of area investigated: 17.5 sq m
NGR (to 8 figures): SP 89229-08429		
Site code: 565		
Site director/Organization: ASC Ltd		
Type of work Evaluation		
Date of work:	Start: April 19 th	Finish: April 19 th
Location of finds/Curating museum: n/a		
Related SMR Nos: n/a		Periods represented: modern
Relevant previous summaries/reports n/a		
Summary of fieldwork results: <i>In the spring of 2004 Archaeological Services & Consultancy undertook an evaluation within the messuage of 1 Billet Lane, Berkhamsted. A single trench was excavated within the footprint of the proposed building which confirmed that the site stood on de-calcified, chalky alluvium, which in turn overlay fluvio-glacials. No archaeological deposits or artefacts were present on the site.</i>		
Author of summary: J. R. Hunn		Date of summary: 23/4/04