



West Wycombe Park IT Cable Trench Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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West Wycombe Park, IT Cable Trench

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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Summary

Between 27th March and 4th April 2018, Oxford Archaeology undertook an archaeological watching brief, monitoring the excavation of an IT cable trench at the east of West Wycombe Park, Buckinghamshire, for the National Trust.

The fieldwork revealed a series of levelling and made-ground deposits for the existing road surfaces, overlying two 19th century wall foundations. Historic mapping suggests the walls relate to outbuildings and a boundary wall. No further archaeological remains were revealed.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank the National Trust for commissioning this project.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by John Boothroyd and the fieldwork was undertaken by Christof Heistermann. Digitising was carried out by Gary Jones. Thanks are also extended to the teams of OA staff that cleaned and packaged the finds under the management of Leigh Allen, and prepared the archive under the management of Nicola Scott.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by the National Trust to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the installation of a fibre optic communication cable at West Wycombe Park, Buckinghamshire.
- 1.1.2 All work was undertaken in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists guidance documents for archaeological watching briefs (CifA 2014)

1.2 Location, topography and geology

- 1.2.1 The site lies at the western edge of High Wycombe, on a lane that runs through West Wycombe Park between the A40 and Chapel Lane, parallel to West Wycombe Road. It sits within a gently undulating landscape approximately 90m aOD.
- 1.2.2 The route of the cable trench starts at Park Farm and passes through several areas of hard standing before following the route of the access road and joining Chapel Lane.
- 1.2.3 The solid geology of the area is mapped as Pit Chalk Formation, a sedimentary Bedrock formed approximately 90 to 94 million years ago in the Cretaceous period. Although no drift geology is recorded for this area, the geology observed during the fieldwork comprised clay silt alluvial deposits (BGS Online).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeology and historical background to the site has been described in detail in a previously prepared desk-Based assessment for another development within West Wycombe Park (OA 2017). A general summary of this is reproduced below.
- 1.3.2 West Wycombe House is a Grade I listed building and the surrounding parkland is included in the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest. There are additional Grade I, II* and II buildings in the parkland, in the village, and to the north-west on West Wycombe Hill. Furthermore, the Iron Age hillfort on West Wycombe Hill is a Scheduled Monument. The estate was purchased in 1698 by Sir Samuel Dashwood and his brother Francis, and the clear majority of the features in the parkland and Pleasure Grounds are thought to have been commissioned by Francis Dashwood and his son the second baronet, inspired by his lengthy stays in Italy. Today West Wycombe Park is owned by the National Trust and is open to the public.

1.4 Prehistoric period (500,000 BP - 43 AD)

- 1.4.1 There have been three finds of prehistoric flints in the vicinity of the park. The first was an Upper Palaeolithic or Mesolithic flint blade found within the park itself. The second was a Neolithic flint blade and two flakes. The third, a Neolithic polished flint axe, was found at Toweridge.
- 1.4.2 A substantial earthwork has been recorded in the area. This has been tentatively interpreted as a Bronze Age round barrow, though it is thought locally to have been an

18th-century landscape feature, which is perhaps more likely given its location on a valley floor.

- 1.4.3 The scheduled Iron Age hillfort located to the north of the park is obviously the most substantial Iron Age feature in the area. It is a circular fort with a monumental double ditch and bank enclosure, truncated by the Dashwood family mausoleum and the medieval church of St Lawrence.
- 1.4.4 An Iron Age/Roman field system comprising lynchets, probably associated with the hillfort, is recorded on the slopes of the hill to the north of the site. Other potentially Iron Age earthworks indicative of a field system have been surveyed within the park to the north-east of Druid's Hut, more than 500m away from the park.

1.5 Romano-British period (AD 43-410)

- 1.5.1 There are a number of definite and possible Roman remains within the area. The most substantial of these are two partially excavated Roman cemeteries located more than 300m apart at 40 Church Lane in West Wycombe Village (Carlyle 2010) and to the north between the line of the A40 and the northern border of West Wycombe Park (Farley and Wright 1979). A third cemetery was excavated in 1845 at St Paul's Church, but the graves were undated (Marshall 2008).
- 1.5.2 It has been suggested from substantial finds of Roman pottery found whilst dredging the lake bed in the park that a Roman villa might be found in the area (Harman 1934; Marshall 2008). However, this may have been located on the site of the present-day village rather than in the immediate locale of the lake (Marshall 2008). In 1991 metal detectorists turned up 237 Roman coins from the dredged lake silts among other Roman finds. Several features comprising pits and ditches have also been identified (Marshall 2008).

1.6 The early medieval (AD 410-1066) and medieval periods (AD 1066-1550)

- 1.6.1 Early medieval remains from the area are very few, but include two instances of Anglo-Saxon metalwork found by metal detecting outside the park to the north and two more from within the park and to the south, including a very fine coin of Offa (AD 757-796). The manor of West Wycombe ('*Wicumbe*') is recorded in Domesday Book as belonging to the Bishops of Winchester and is first recorded in 944-6 (McOmish *et al.* 2001).
- 1.6.2 Medieval remains from the area are few, although there is plenty of documentary evidence for the medieval manor being within the area, and it certainly appears in the Domesday survey of 1086.
- 1.6.3 There is some evidence that the village of West Wycombe was a planned medieval settlement, although the standing vernacular architecture of the village dates at the earliest to the early 15th century at the Old Vicarage, Church Loft. During the medieval period the manor was an important source of food for the monks of Winchester. After the Dissolution in 1551 it was taken over by the crown and, after changing hands a few times, the estate was granted to a former tenant Lord Dormer in 1602 (Everett 1993, 5; McOmish *et al.* 2001, 14).

1.6.4 The 13th century Church of St Lawrence built within the Iron Age hillfort on West Wycombe Hill was the most substantial medieval structure in the area, although it was heavily remodelled in the 18th century. A small amount of 13th and 14th century pottery has been found near the church, as well as on Park Farm Road.

1.7 Post-medieval period (1550 – 1900)

1.7.1 There have been no recorded post-medieval assets within the site. The site lies within the former gardens of the North West Lodge which lies to the north of the site and is a Grade II* listed building dating from the 18th century. It appears on the John Richardson's Estate map of West Wycombe, 1767.

2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The project aims and objectives were as follows:

- i. To determine or confirm the general nature of any remains present.
- ii. To determine or confirm the approximate date or date range of any remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence.
- iii. To mitigate the impacts of the cable trench on any buried archaeological deposits or features.
- iv. To contextualise the findings within the local and regional landscapes.
- v. To make available the results of the watching brief.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The watching brief was maintained during the excavation of the cable trench over a total of three days between 27th March 2018 and 4th April 2018.

2.2.2 The cable trench was excavated using a mechanical excavator to a depth of 0.6m below ground level, with a toothless bucket c 0.3m wide.

2.2.3 Deposits of archaeological interest were cleaned by hand, and recorded using a combination of photographic and written record. All work was undertaken in accordance with the CifA Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief (CifA 2014).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

3.1.1 The results of the evaluation are presented below, and include a stratigraphic description of the deposits encountered. The full details of all deposits with dimensions and depths can be found in Appendix A.

3.2 Archaeological deposits

3.2.1 The cable trench excavation revealed a predominance of made ground, with a variety of deposits laid either as surfaces or as make-up layers. Just two archaeologically significant features, walls 10 and 13, were observed (Fig 2).

3.2.2 Structure 10 comprised two courses of red bricks (230mm x 70mm), bonded with a pale grey, lime mortar (Fig. 3). It measured 0.57m wide and 0.16m high. Due to the narrow width of the trench it was not possible to determine precisely the orientation of the wall beyond a broad north-south alignment.

3.2.3 Structure 13 consisted of red bricks (230mm x 110 x 67mm) and angular flint cobbles, with a light grey, sandy lime mortar (Fig. 4). The wall was observed at an oblique angle within the narrow trench, preventing the full width of the structure from being determined. It is also unclear what the orientation of the wall was, although it appeared broadly north-south aligned.

3.2.4 The adjacent layers of made-ground were recorded abutting and overlying these structural remains.

3.3 Finds summary

3.3.1 A brick sample was recovered from wall 13. The weight and density of the bricks combined with their dimensions and fairly neat manufacture confirm a 19th-century date.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

4.1.1 Despite the variable weather throughout the watching brief, the conditions were generally favourable for the observation of archaeological features. The deposits in the trench could be seen clearly and without the hindrance that can result from heavy rain or flooding. The only factor affecting the reliability of the investigation would be the narrowness of the trench through which the remains were observed. Owing to the width of the trench it was not possible to determine the precise orientations of the structures. Such small excavations can also be problematic in terms of interpretation as floor surfaces, and other structural remains are more easily understood when exposed over a large area. However, in this instance the deposit sequence appears to have been relatively simple.

4.2 Evaluation objectives and results

4.2.1 Overall, just two walls were located along the route of the cable trench. These were accompanied by a series of made-ground deposits. The bricks used in both structures were identical and date to the 19th century.

4.3 Interpretation

4.3.1 The two walls are inevitably part of larger linear structures, but as they differ in their construction they are unlikely to be part of the same building. Therefore, it is most likely that they were foundations of boundary walls rather than enclosed structures. Although it is still possible that differential preservation could have removed any elements of contemporary walls. Both walls date to the 19th century, based on the type of bricks used in their construction.

4.3.2 West Wycombe Park was subject to a vernacular buildings survey in 1992, which included Park Farm. Though it is not definite, plans within the report suggest that wall 10 relates to outbuildings associated with the farm, and wall 13 the property boundary wall (Fig. 5; NT 1992).

4.3.3 The associated made-ground deposits almost certainly represent construction phases of the roadway along which the cable trench route was excavated.

4.4 Significance

4.4.1 Without exposing the full extent of these structures, it is difficult to establish the significance of these remains or their exact association with known structures shown on the existing site plans.

4.4.2 However, the potential for remains of this nature to survive in this vicinity should be seen as significant and certainly taken into consideration for any further development in this part of the park.

APPENDIX A TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
1	Layer	-	-	Concrete	-	-
2	Layer	-	0.15	Natural, brown silt, frequent angular flint	-	-
3	Layer	-	-	Topsoil	-	-
4	Layer	-	0.08	Hard standing, light red, sandy gravel	-	-
5	Layer	-	0.04	Greyish brown, sandy loam	-	-
6	Layer	-	0.1	Black crushed stone and clinker	-	-
7	Layer	-	0.05	Pale yellow sandy mortar	-	-
8	Layer	-	0.16	Made ground, greyish brown, gravelly sandy loam	-	-
9	Modern	0.98	0.3	Modern service trench	-	-
10	Wall	0.57	0.16	Brick wall, red bricks and sandy lime mortar. 230mm x 70mm bricks.	-	-
11	Layer	-	0.06	Surface, crushed white chalk	-	-
12	Layer	-	0.08	Yellow gravelly clay sand	-	-
13	Wall	0.64	0.28	Brick and flint wall, red bricks, mortar and flints	-	C19th
14	Layer	-	0.38	Made ground	-	-
15	Layer	-	0.26	Made ground	-	-

APPENDIX B FINDS REPORTS

B.1 Brick

By John Cotter

- B.1.1 Two brick samples were recovered from a single context (13). These have not been separately catalogued but are fully described below. No further work is recommended.
- B.1.2 One and a half bricks (total weight 4316g). The complete brick (weight 2894g) and the broken half-brick (1422g) are of identical appearance - the half brick freshly broken to expose the internal fabric and colour. The complete brick is 230mm long x 110mm wide x 67mm thick. It is unfrogged and neatly made with sharp arrises (angles) and with a fairly rough sandy surface finish. The half brick is identical. Both have the character of typical 19th-century 'stock' bricks or ordinary domestic house bricks. The surfaces are a dull purplish- to orange-brown colour. The internal fabric colour is a much brighter orange-brown with large inclusions of flint (including small pebbles) and small to large inclusions of iron oxide, or possibly slag or clinker, variously fired to a black or purplish colour. A few sparse inclusions of yellowish clay or clay pellets are also present. The weight and density of the bricks combined with their dimensions and fairly neat manufacture confirm a 19th-century dating. Both show traces of white lime mortar from use.

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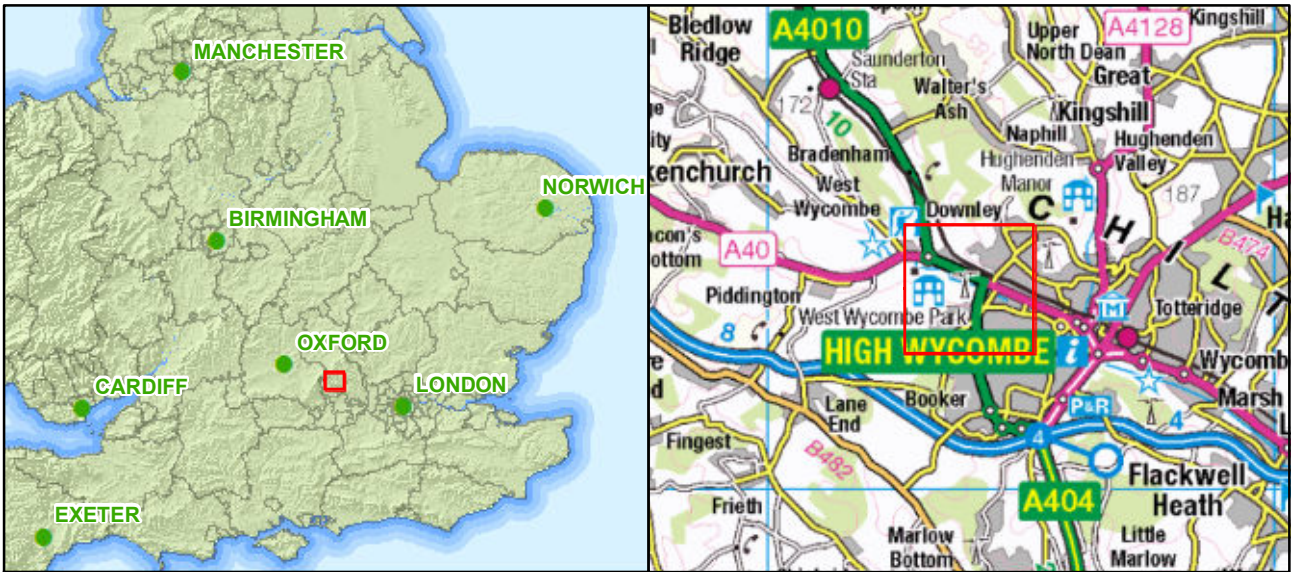
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APPENDIX D**SITE SUMMARY DETAILS**

Site name:	West Wycombe Park, IT Cable Trench
Site code:	WWPIT 18
Grid Reference	SU 84104 93873
Type:	Watching Brief
Date and duration:	3 days, between 27/03/18 and 04/04/18
Area of Site	155m ²
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Buckinghamshire County Museum in due course, under the following accession number: AYBCM:2018.47.
Summary of Results:	<p>Oxford Archaeology undertook an archaeological watching brief, monitoring the excavation of an IT cable trench at the east of West Wycombe Park, Oxfordshire.</p> <p>The fieldwork revealed a series of levelling and made ground deposits for the existing road surfaces, overlying two 19th century wall foundations. No further archaeological remains were revealed.</p>



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 Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA,

Figure 1: Site location



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Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

Figure 2: Location of walls within Cable Trench

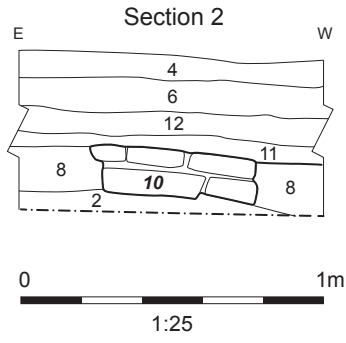


Figure 3: Section 2 and photo showing wall 10 and associated deposits

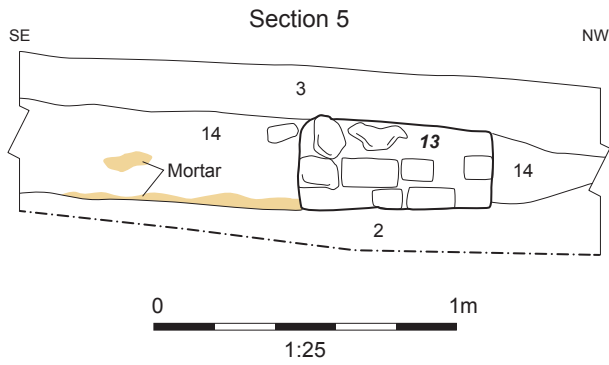


Figure 4: Section 5 and photo showing wall 13 and associated deposits



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