

New Office Accomodation (NOA)  
AWE Aldermarston  
West Berkshire



**Archaeological Evaluation Report**



December 2006

**Client: Atkins on behalf of AWE**

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**New Office Accommodation (NOA),  
AWE Aldermaston,  
West Berkshire**

NGR: SU 600 640

***ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION***

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## SUMMARY

*In October 2006, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation within the AWE Aldermaston Complex, West Berkshire. The fieldwork was undertaken for Atkins Ltd on behalf of AWE in advance of the proposal for construction of new office accommodation. The evaluation revealed an absence of archaeological remains, although the topography would suggest a degree of landscaping in the past for one of the three runways of the WWII airfield.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 In October 2006 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at AWE Aldermaston, West Berkshire. The fieldwork was undertaken for Atkins Ltd on behalf of AWE in respect of a planning application for new office accommodation. An Archaeological Evaluation method statement was produced by Atkins (2006, Atkins), to which OA adhered.

### 1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site lies within the AWE Aldermaston Complex, West Berkshire, between Reading and Newbury (SU 600 640 centred). The development site is located approximately 0.5 km north of the town of Tadley.
- 1.2.2 The site is currently used as unenclosed heathland and coniferous forestry.
- 1.2.3 The underlying geology is Bagshot Beds gravel overlying Oxford Clay.

### 1.3 Archaeological background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the project site and its environs has already been outlined in the project brief and is reproduced below.
- 1.3.2 The area around the site has a complex history of human intervention containing many known and many more potential sites of archaeological interest. Henges, long and round barrows, linear bank and ditch earthworks such as Grim's Bank, Roman settlements, traces of ancient field systems and evidence of lynchetts are all frequent and characteristic features of the historic landscape of the region (*Countryside Agency 1999*) as well as features representing 20<sup>th</sup> century activities and development.
- 1.3.3 ***Early prehistoric period (c.500,000-4,000BC):*** Although some Palaeolithic occupation of the Thames Valley is indicated by flint finds, these are generally found in the floodplains of the Kennet (*Cunliffe 1993, pp 5 – 35*). These groups seem to have spread up the slopes from the riverside to what was probably good grazing land on the edge of the gravel plateau.

- 1.3.4 **Neolithic period (c.4,000-2,500BC):** During the Neolithic period, the region was likely to have been open pasture, used by the local population on the slopes of the plateau. There is little evidence for Neolithic activity near AWE Aldermaston.
- 1.3.5 **Bronze Age (c 2,300BC - 700BC):** By the Bronze Age, the area seems to have been part of a potentially widespread funerary landscape with burial mounds (barrows) being recorded throughout the region. The heathland of the plateau would have been amenable to animal pasture and grazing. Settlements may have been sited nearer to the River Kennet. Clusters of barrows at Mortimer Common and at Brimpton attest to a Bronze Age use of the site and its environs.
- 1.3.6 **Iron Age: (c. 700BC-AD43):** Iron Age activity in the region is mainly characterised by agricultural settlement, enclosed farm sites featuring rectangular enclosures and related field layout (Cunliffe 1996, pp 165). Just north of the development area lies a section of Grim's Bank, a linear earthwork. This section of Grim's Bank is part of a much larger monument that runs for three miles from Ufton Nervet to AWE Aldermaston. Investigations carried out here in 2005 failed to conclusively date the monument, but it is thought likely to have been constructed between the Late Iron Age and the Later Roman period (OA 2005).
- 1.3.7 **Roman period (AD43-AD415):** A major administrative capital (Callewa) was located 3 km to the south-east of the proposed development, close to the village of Silchester. The Cirencester to Silchester Roman road, is believed to run through AWE Aldermaston, at the northern extent of the study area (Cunliffe, 1993, pp237-263).
- 1.3.8 **Early Medieval period (AD415-AD1086):** a Saxon settlement at Aldermaston is recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086, as Eldermanestone, the 'Alderman's Town'. It was identified as 'king's land', an estate formerly in the hands of the Saxon Royal Estate. It is possible that Grim's Bank continued in use through the period as a defensive system (WS Atkins, 2001). The Domesday Book also records two manors in Brimpton, one of which was later presented to the Knights Hospitallers. It is likely that the population increased during this period and local farming would have needed to expand to support the community (Bettey, JH, 1986).
- 1.3.9 **Medieval period (1086-1540):** During the Norman period, much of the area now occupied by AWE Aldermaston was probably part of the manorial hunting grounds of the Aldermaston Estate. The wool industry brought relative prosperity to the area, and more arable land was enclosed and converted to pasture. This period also saw landownership changes precipitated by the Reformation and Dissolution of the Monasteries.
- 1.3.10 **Post-Medieval period (1540-1900):** The wool trade continued into the post medieval period, and more land was enclosed for sheep rearing. Population continued to increase and this is reflected in the development of towns such as Newbury and Reading. At Aldermaston, 19th century enclosure increased the area of the Aldermaston estate. Little Heath, including a stretch of Grim's Bank, became part of Aldermaston Park.

- 1.3.11 ***The 20th Century:*** Berkshire became the location for a number of military installations such as AWE sites, Farnborough Airfield and Greenham Common Airfield, due to its flat topography and proximity to London and the English Channel. AWE Aldermaston continued to change through the Cold War, with new areas and buildings being added within which Britain's nuclear deterrent was researched and developed.

## 2 EVALUATION AIMS

- 2.1.1 To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the proposed development area.
- 2.1.2 To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains affected by the proposed works.
- 2.1.3 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features within the site and to take samples where appropriate.
- 2.1.4 To make available the results of the investigation.

## 3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Scope of fieldwork

- 3.1.1 The evaluation consisted of the removal of topsoil and subsoil down to the archaeological horizon within one 10 m trench (Fig. 2, Pl. 1).

### 3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

- 3.2.1 The overburden was removed under close archaeological supervision by a 360 excavator fitted with a 1.7 m wide toothless grading bucket. Excavation by machine proceeded in 0.3 m deep spits down to either undisturbed natural deposits or to the highest significant archaeological horizon, whichever was encountered first.
- 3.2.2 The site was cleaned by hand and potential features were sampled to determine their nature and extent, and to retrieve finds and environmental samples if present. The site was planned at a scale of 1:50 and the sections of the archaeological features were drawn at a scale of 1:10. All features were photographed by an AWE representative. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (OAU, 1992).

### 3.3 Finds

- 3.3.1 No finds were recovered during the evaluation.

### 3.4 Palaeo-environmental evidence

- 3.4.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were encountered during the course of the evaluation.

### **3.5 Presentation of results**

- 3.5.1 The results of the evaluation are presented below, with the stratigraphic account of the site described, followed by an overall discussion and interpretation.

## **4 RESULTS: GENERAL**

### **4.1 Soils and ground conditions**

- 4.1.1 The trench came down onto natural sandy clay deposits. The soil divisions were clearly defined with little or no mixing between the contexts. The weather conditions were fair.

## **5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS**

### **5.1 Description of deposits**

- 5.1.1 The underlying natural; a compact light whitish brown sandy clay with patches of soft orangey brown sandy clay (2), was encountered at a depth of 0.25 m below ground level. Running approximately SW-NE at the northern end of the trench was an uneven natural linear feature (5). Only part of this feature was visible within the trench. The visible width of the feature was 0.57 m and the depth was greater than 0.1 m. The feature had an uneven side and no visible base and was likely caused by bioturbation. It was filled with an orangey brown sandy clay (4), similar to the natural (2), which was overlain by a 0.1 m thick layer of light brownish grey sandy clay (3).
- 5.1.2 Directly to the south of feature 5 was a SW-NE aligned linear feature (8) cutting the natural (2). The feature was 0.4 m wide and had a depth of 0.15 m. It had fairly steep sloping sides with an uneven base and was almost certainly a natural feature similar to (5) above. The feature was filled a 0.08 m thick layer of orangey brown sandy clay (7), similar to the natural (2). This was overlain by a 0.07 m thick layer of light brownish grey sandy clay (6).
- 5.1.3 A large amount of bioturbation was visible throughout the trench.
- 5.1.4 All of these features were sealed by a 0.25 m thick layer of dark brown sandy loam (1) the current day topsoil and turf.

## **6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION**

### **6.1 Reliability of field investigation**

- 6.1.1 The trench was taken down to the natural horizon, and all features were sampled.
- 6.1.2 The conditions in the field were fine and dry. The trench was relatively small and cannot be considered as absolutely indicative of the proposal site as a whole.

### **6.2 Overall interpretation**

- 6.2.1 This area was probably open heathland prior to the levelling of the area to create an airfield, as there was no evidence within the trench for ploughing (no scarring of the underlying clay or a plough soil was noted). However, it has been suggested that the former use of the site as an airfield with three landing strips would have had a direct and adverse effect on any underlying deposits and likewise therefore any archaeological remains. The topography of the site is indeed flat and it is wholly possible that a degree of landscaping, utilising the cutting away of the upper soil sequence has been undertaken in the recent past, however, while it is difficult to prove at this stage, further evidence may come to light in future to corroborate this.
- 6.2.2 The evaluation trench came down onto the natural sandy clay (2) which was overlain by a 0.25 m thick layer of topsoil and turf (1).
- 6.2.3 No archaeology was uncovered over the course of the evaluation.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Thick. (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Layer	-	0.25	Topsoil and turf	-	-
2	Natural	-	-	Natural sandy clay	-	-
3	Fill	> 0.57	0.07	Probable subsoil	-	-
4	Fill	> 0.57	> 0.03	Probable natural	-	-
5	Cut	> 0.57	> 0.01	Bioturbation	-	-
6	Fill	0.4	0.07	Fill of feature 8	-	-
7	Fill	0.35	0.08	Fill of feature 8	-	-
8	Cut	0.4	0.15	Natural feature	-	-

## APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Atkins, 2006 *New Office Accommodation (NOA), AWE Aldermaston, Berkshire: Brief for an Archaeological Evaluation*

IFA, 2001 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluation*

OA, 1992 *Field Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson)

## APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

**Client name:** RPS on behalf of AWE

**Site name:** New Office Accommodation (NOE), AWE Aldermaston

**Site code:** ALDAWE06

**Grid reference:** SU 600 640

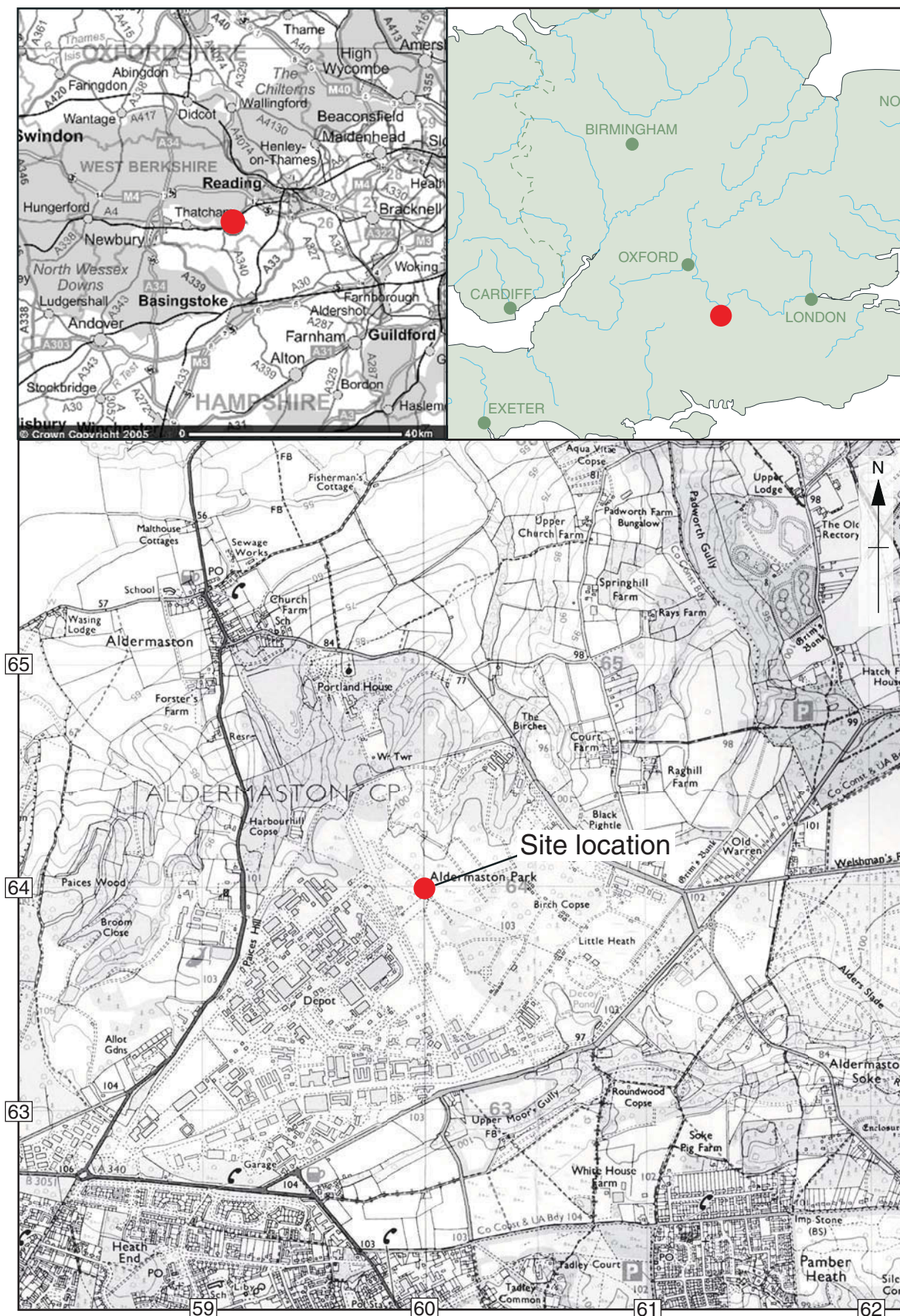
**Type of evaluation:** Single trench evaluation

**Date and duration of project:** 16th October 2006, one day

**Area of site:** One trench 10 x 1.8 m

**Summary of results:** No archaeology was encountered and deposits recorded suggest this area was truncated during levelling of the area to form part of the WWII runway.

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the appropriate Museums Service in due course.



Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location