

73B Essex Street, Newbury, Berkshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief



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for

Mr and Mrs A. Serruya

by



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Non-Technical Summary

Context One Archaeological Services (COAS) carried out an archaeological watching brief at 73B Essex Street, Newbury, Berkshire (centred on NGR SU 45413 64961) on the 17th October 2011. The project has been commissioned by Mr and Mrs A. Serruya at the request of Mr Duncan Coe (Archaeological Officer, West Berkshire Council).

The house stands on the north side of Wash Common, near a group of five Bronze Age burial mounds and is within an area identified as the site of the first Battle of Newbury during the English Civil War. Until the late 19th century the common comprised fields but only very sparse housing. There was a gradual infilling of the land until the 1960s but even then the Common retained its more open character. By the mid 1970s it had been transformed, with more infilling in the north, including the present house on the Site, and a large estate to the south. No archaeological features were identified and there were no finds.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Context One Archaeological Services (COAS) carried out an archaeological watching brief on the 17th October 2011 during groundworks associated with the erection of a two-storey rear extension and front roof dormer windows at 73B Essex Street, Newbury, Berkshire (centred on NGR SU 45413 64961; hereafter referred to as the Site). The project was commissioned and funded by Mr and Mrs A. Serruya.
- 1.2 The watching brief was requested by Mr Duncan Coe (Archaeological Officer, West Berkshire Council (WBC)) and follows advice given by Central Government as set out in Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 5: Planning for the Historic Environment (2010) and the Local Development Framework Policy on Archaeology. In a consultation letter dated 5 July 2011, Mr Coe stated that:

'The site falls adjacent to a scheduled monument, SM12075 the Bronze Age barrow cemetery at Wash Common (designated and protected under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979). The site also falls within the historic battlefield of the first battle of Newbury fought in September 1643. Although the site falls outside the designated part of the battlefield it is known that this area was the scene of heavy fighting and was a strategically important part of the battle. I note that no description of the heritage assets or impact assessment of the development on those assets is included with the application. This is now a minimal requirement for designated and known heritage assets under PPS5...

...Therefore I would recommend that the following condition should be attached to any approval granted.

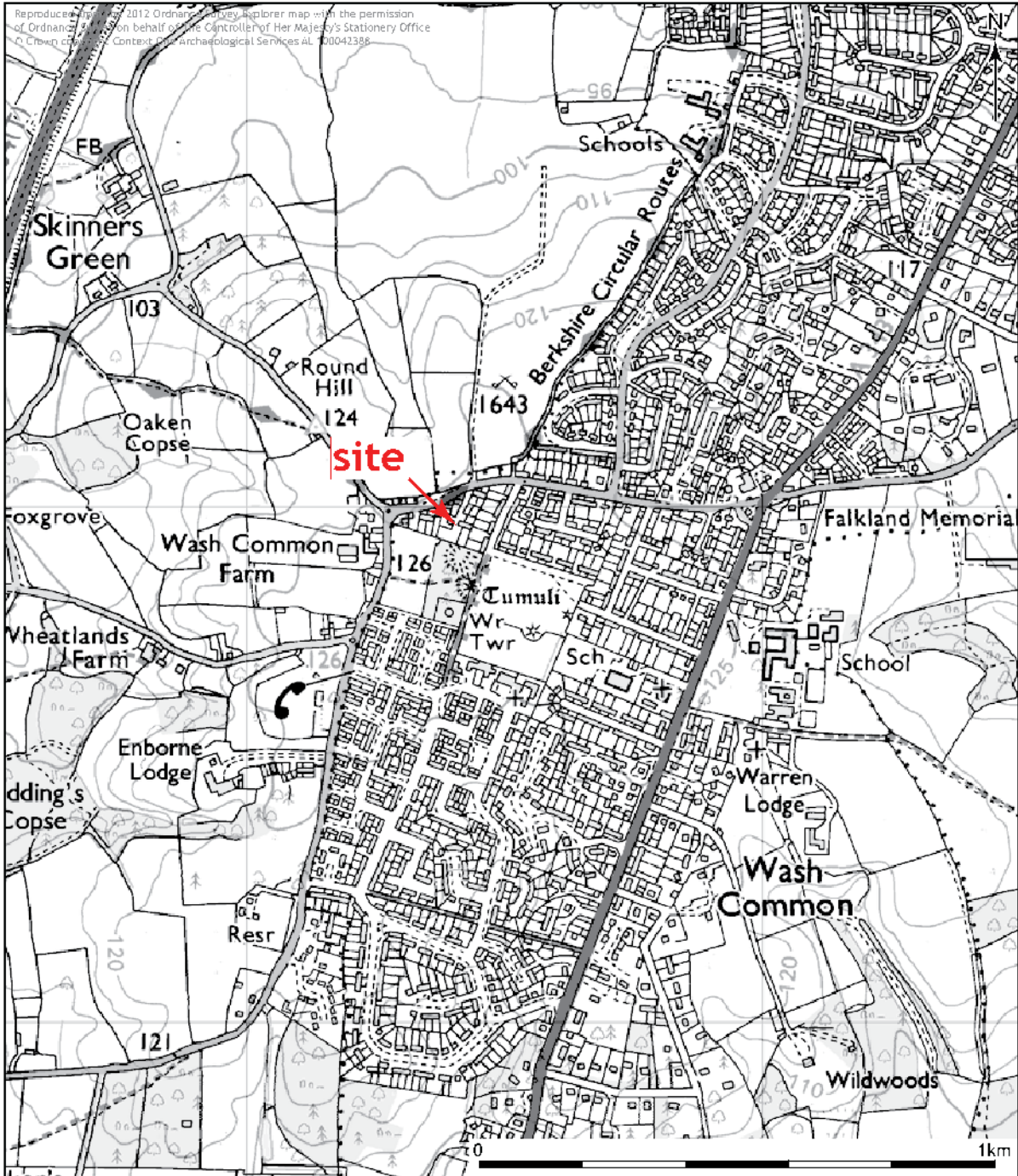
No development shall take place within the application area until the applicant has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted by the applicant and approved by the Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that any archaeological features or finds identified are adequately investigated and recorded.'

- 1.3 It was determined that a reasonable archaeological response would be to carry out a watching brief during all ground disturbance associated with the development.
- 1.4 This report summarises the topographical, geological, archaeological setting of the Site, and presents the results of the archaeological investigation.

2. Site Location, Topography and Geology

- 2.1 Newbury is c. 20km north-west of Basingstoke, spread on either side of the A4. The Site lies c. 2km south-west of the town centre on the north side of an area known as Wash Common (**Figure 1**). It is in a *cul de sac* c. 80m south-south-west of the access from Essex Street and c. 33m north of a scrubby area of surviving open common. It occupies land at c. 126m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) on a gentle south-south-west facing slope. The general area is within the crook of an elbow formed at the junctions of Essex Road to the north and Enborne Street to the west.
- 2.2 The Site lies on superficial deposits of Silchester Grand Member Quaternary Sand and Gravel over London Clay Formation Palaeogene Sand (BGS 2012).



PROJECT TITLE		
73b Essex Street, Newbury, Berkshire		
FIGURE TITLE		
Site setting		
SCALE	PROJECT CODE	FIGURE NO.
as shown	C1/WBF/11/ENB	1

3. Archaeological and Historical Background

3.1 The archaeological background for the Site has been drawn from the West Berkshire Council Heritage Environment Record, principally mapping. Only areas pertinent to the Site are mentioned in the text. They are marked on **Figure 2** and listed in **Appendix 1**.

Bronze Age (AD2400 - 800)

3.2 Five mounds, assumed to be Bronze Age barrows, lie to the south-west of the Site. The nearest is a little over 30m from it, the furthest c. 250m. Four of the barrows are shown very distinctly on maps from at least 1881.

Post-medieval (AD1547 - 1799)

3.3 During the English Civil War the first Battle of Newbury between Parliamentarian and Royalist forces took place on the 20th September 1643. A local tradition asserts that two of the barrow mounds mentioned above covered separately the dead of the Parliamentarian and Royalist armies, the nearest mound bisected by a field boundary and located only c. 34m south of the Site. A third mound reputedly covered the horses. The tradition appears to date to the laying of a memorial to the dead in 1897. The academic community places the burial area on a hill c. 300m from the Site.

Modern (AD1800 -)

3.4 The major roads bordering the general area to the north and west, Essex Street and Enborne Street, both appear in much their present form in the Ordnance Survey map of 1881. The area predominantly consisted of moderately sized fields, with a Methodist Chapel situated on the west side of what was to become the access to the Site.

3.5 By 1899 the area was being set apart from the general common by a new road adjoining Essex Street from the south along which semi-detached houses had been constructed. This began a process of infilling which remained gradual until at least the early 1960s. In the map of 1961 much of Wash Common remained open but by 1977 there was more infilling to its north end, which included the house which constitutes the Site. A large estate occupied the south of the Common.

4. Methodology

Groundwork

4.1 The groundworks comprised the cutting of a foundation trench through a concrete slab patio and lawn on the south-west side of the house (**Plate 1**). The trench was excavated by a tracked mini-digger fitted with a 0.80m wide toothless bucket (**Plate 2**).

Archaeological Methodology

4.2 The archaeological work was carried out in accordance with the codes, standards and guidelines set out by the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA 1985, rev. 2010; 1990, rev. 2008; 1994, rev. 2008) at all times during the course of the investigation. Current Health and Safety legislation and guidelines were followed on site.

4.3 The work comprised the observation of groundworks, cleaning of sections and recording. In addition, a local metal detectorist scanned the spoil. No finds were recovered. All deposits were recorded using standard COAS pro-forma recording sheets. Stratigraphic relationships were recorded using a 'Harris-Winchester matrix' diagram. A photographic record comprised digital images of the excavated areas and working shots to illustrate the nature of the archaeological operation mounted.

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site boundary profile locations	PROJECT TITLE 73b Essex Street, Newbury, Berkshire		
	FIGURE TITLE Detailed site setting, development footprint and profile locations		
	SCALE as shown	PROJECT CODE C1/WBF/11/ENB	FIGURE NO. 2



Plate 1. General location of foundation trench (from SE)



Plate 2. Excavated foundation trench (from SW)



Plate 3. Soak away profile (from W; 1m scale)



Plate 4. Foundation trench profile (from N)

5. Results

- 5.1 The deposits encountered during fieldwork are listed and described in **Appendix 2**. In the text, context numbers for layers and deposits appear in standard brackets, e.g. (102). Where a feature is discussed, it is referenced with its cut, and associated fill.

Soil sequence

- 5.2 The profile from the soakaway trench best exemplified the soil sequence. It comprised a turf and pebbly topsoil (200) (**Plate 3**) of c. 0.40m depth, which sealed an earlier cultivated soil (201). This covered a layer resembling a gravelly head deposit (202) over natural sand (203).
- 5.3 The area of the foundation trench reflected the more direct impact of the construction of 73B Essex Street, which is a modern house. The turf and topsoil (100) (**Plate 4**) sealed a gravelly flint make-up layer (101) of variable thickness. This sealed a cultivation horizon (102) where it survived in hollows in the underlying surface (103) of gravels interspersed with lenses of clay, which was interpreted as a further makeup layer.
- 5.4 No archaeological features or deposits were identified and no artefacts were recovered.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 The house stands on the north side of Wash Common, near a group of five Bronze Age barrows and is within the area identified as the site of the first Battle of Newbury during the English Civil War. Until the late 19th century the common comprised fields but only very sparse housing. There was a gradual infilling of the land until the 1960s but even then the Common retained its more open character. By the mid 1970s it had been transformed, with more infilling in the north, including the present house on the Site, and a large estate to the south.
- 6.2 No evidence for activity associated with the barrows, the battle or any other archaeological remains were identified during the watching brief.

7. Archive

- 7.1 The Site archive is currently held at the offices of Context One Archaeological Services Ltd and consists of 13 digital images in .jpg format, including 1 profile sheet and various registers. There were no scaled drawings due to the lack of features. The archive will be prepared to comply with guidelines set out in Environmental Standards for the Permanent Storage of Excavated Material from Archaeological Sites (UKIC 1984, Conservation Guidelines 3)/ Guidelines for the Preparation of Excavation Archives for Long-term Storage (UKIC 1990)/ Standards in the Museums Care of Archaeological Collections (Museum and Galleries Commission 1992)/ Management of Archaeological Projects 2 (English Heritage 1991). Arrangements will be made to deposit the archive with West Berkshire Museum within 12 months following the submission of this report.
- 7.2 Copies of the Watching Brief report will be deposited with:

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Newbury
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RG14 6RA

West Berkshire Museum
The Wharf
Newbury
Berkshire
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8. COAS Acknowledgements

- 8.1 Context One Archaeological Services Ltd would like to thank Mr and Mrs A. Serruya their assistance during the course of the project. We are also grateful to Mr Duncan Coe (Archaeological Officer, West Berkshire Council) for curatorial advice and to Terry, the metal detectorist.

9. Bibliography

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Appendix 1. Context Summary

Context no.	Period	Type	Description	Earlier than	Contemp. with	Later than	Length	Width/ Diameter	Thickness / Depth
100	Modern	Layer	Topsoil. Mid grey brown (5YR 4/1) soft clay including frequent small subangular flint pebbles			101			0.30m
101	Modern	Layer	Make-up. Light grey gravel comprising frequent small subangular flint pebbles	100		102			0.20m
102	Modern	Layer	Cultivation horizon. Dark greyish brown loam including occasional subangular flint pebbles	101		103			0.25m
103	Modern	Layer	Hogging. Occasional lenses of soft mid grey clay set within mid orange (5YR 6/8) frequent subangular small flint gravel	102					0.75m exc
200	Modern	Layer	Topsoil. Mid grey brown (5YR 4/1) soft clay including frequent small subangular flint pebbles.			201			0.40m
201	Modern	Layer	Cultivation horizon. Dark greyish brown loam including occasional subangular flint pebbles	200		202			<0.22m
202	Geological	Layer	Gravel deposit. Light grey grits and gravels set in sandy silt	201		203			0.35m
203	Geological	Layer	Natural. Mid orange (5YR 6/8) gritty sand mottled with patches of frequent subangular gravel	202					0.50m exc

Appendix 2. West Berkshire Council Sites and Monuments Record report for archaeological events within the environs of the Site

HER No.	Description	NGR	Figure 1 ref
Bronze Age (2400 BC to 800 BC)			
MWB233315	<p>Barrow group. Five barrows on Wash common.</p> <p>A: A ring-mound with ditch outside the bank. This may or may not be sepulchral.</p> <p>B: A large bowl barrow, perhaps originally a bell-shaped barrow with narrow berm. It has a surrounding ditch</p> <p>C: A bowl barrow with no visible ditch</p> <p>D: A bowl barrow with no visible ditch</p> <p>E: A bowl barrow with no visible ditch</p> <p>Local traditions associate D and E with burials from the Civil War battle of Newbury and each now has a memorial</p>	<p>SU 45426490 ;</p> <p>SU 45446484 ;</p> <p>SU 45486478 ;</p> <p>SU 45556475 ;</p> <p>SU 45626478</p>	Tumuli
Post Medieval (AD1547 – AD1799)			
MWB15762	<p>Battle site. Site of the English Civil War first Battle of Newbury, fought on 20th September 1643</p>	SU 454 654	Crossed swords