

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING
BRIEF AT HEADLEY DRIVE,
EPSOM DOWNS**



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 During August and September 1999 the Surrey County Archaeological Unit carried out a watching brief on groundworks associated with the development of several 3-4 bedroom houses at Headley Drive, Epsom Downs, (see figure 1 for location map). This land was previously part of the playing field belonging to Merland Rise County Primary School, and has been subject to a Preliminary Archaeological Assessment and an archaeological evaluation, both completed by S.C.A.U. The site was recognized as having a high archaeological potential, being in the vicinity of a Saxon cemetery, in addition to evidence for other periods from the area. The evaluation identified several features of archaeological interest, mostly undated, although a late 12th - early 13th century gully was revealed. The presence of these remains and the possibility that outlying burials from the nearby cemetery might exist necessitated the watching brief.

1.2 A final site visit was made in November 1999, in order to assess the progress of the development and the need for the continuation of the watching brief. All the deep ground disturbance associated with the new house foundations and service trenches had been completed, except for those houses to be constructed in the area of the current works compound. It was not, however, anticipated that the development work in this area would commence until spring 2000, and it was decided to produce a report on the watching brief carried out on the remainder of the site, with any information gained from further site inspections, associated with the last phase of the development, to be added at a later date.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 The site was visited on a number of occasions to monitor the groundworks, notably the footing trenches for the houses, an access road and drainage trenches. Close liaison with the site manager enabled these visits to be carried out at appropriate times, when the excavations were open and accessible. Any machine stripped areas and the exposed sections of the various trenches were carefully examined for evidence of archaeological features or layers. Where possible, the removed spoil was briefly scanned for any stray, unstratified artefacts.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Generally, the site revealed a stratigraphy of 0.15-0.25m topsoil over 0.10m of redeposited chalk (possibly imported to improve drainage of the playing field), over 0.15m-0.25m of subsoil over natural chalk. Several features of archaeological interest were revealed. These are listed by context number below, and their positions relative to the development and the earlier evaluation trenches are shown on figure 2.

102: a small N-S aligned gully (fill: mid brown silty clay soil) clearly visible in the section of the footing trench, no finds recovered

103: E-W aligned gully, longitudinally truncated by a drainage trench (fill: mid, slightly red, brown clay soil). Visible for c15m then either tapers out or was obscured by site activity, no finds recovered.

104: Profile of a gully, aligned E-W (fill: mid slightly red brown clay soil). Parallel to 103, no finds recovered.

3.2 Comparison of the location of these features with the location of those revealed in the evaluation (fig 2) shows that contexts 103 and 104 were previously detected in TT 5 (numbered 102 and 101 during the evaluation). Scanning of the spoil heaps proved negative, save for one fragment of burnt flint.

3.3 Two further parallel gullies (105 and 106, see fig 2) were identified aligned east-west in the south east corner of the site, plots 15-19. Both gullies were relatively shallow, c.20-25cm deep, with a width of c.70cm and a gently curving profile. The fill was a mid brown silty clay loam.

3.4 A comparison of the location of these two gullies with the location of the features revealed in the evaluation, suggests that context 105 was previously detected in TT 2 (numbered context 100 during the evaluation), lying c.1.5m, to the north of Chapel Grove boundary bank. The location of gully 106 suggest that it is directly related to the boundary bank. No artefacts were retrieved from the gullies 105 or 106, during the watching brief, although a rim sherd from a medieval grey brown sandyware bowl (late 12th/early 13th century), was recovered from the gully section (100) during the trial trench evaluation.

3.5 The excavations of foundation in plots 6-8, in the north west corner of the site, were not observed by an archaeologist. The site contractors, however, noted that the depth of disturbed ground in this area was greater than in adjacent plots, and it is likely that the ditch (context 105) discovered in trial trench 12, was disturbed, although the date of this feature is still unknown.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Although the features detected during the watching brief remain undated, it is likely, on balance, that they are of ancient rather than recent origin. The fill of these features was of a type that suggested they were of some age and no modern material was present, as would generally be expected if they were recent. However, it is impossible to draw any further conclusions from such evidence, except that the remains are probably associated either with agricultural activity, such as drainage gullies, although whether this indicates prehistoric or later activity is unknown; or plot boundaries associated with 'Chapel Grove', in the case of the features in the south east corner of the site.