

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION
AT ST JOHN'S CHURCH OF ENGLAND COMBINED
SCHOOL,
LACEY GREEN, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE**

SP 8256 9988

On behalf of

The Governors of St John's CE Combined School

AUGUST 2008

REPORT FOR The Governors of St John's CE Combined School
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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services carried out an evaluation at St John's CE Combined School, Lacey Green. The evaluation revealed evidence of a cut feature, which lay at the western end of the evaluation trench and extended beyond the edges of investigation and under the edge of the current school building. It was not possible to conclusively identify the nature of the feature. The cut was in the approximate area of the landscape monument of Grim's Dyke, and was initially believed to be part of the monument. However, pieces of tile and brick were recovered from the fills of the feature which may well be a clay pit rather than an earlier monument.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site location (Figure 1)

The site is located at St John CE Combined School (NGR SP 8256 9988) within a school playground. The underlying geology is Upper Chalk of the Marsupites to Micraster Corangium Zones types, overlain by Clay-with-Flints.

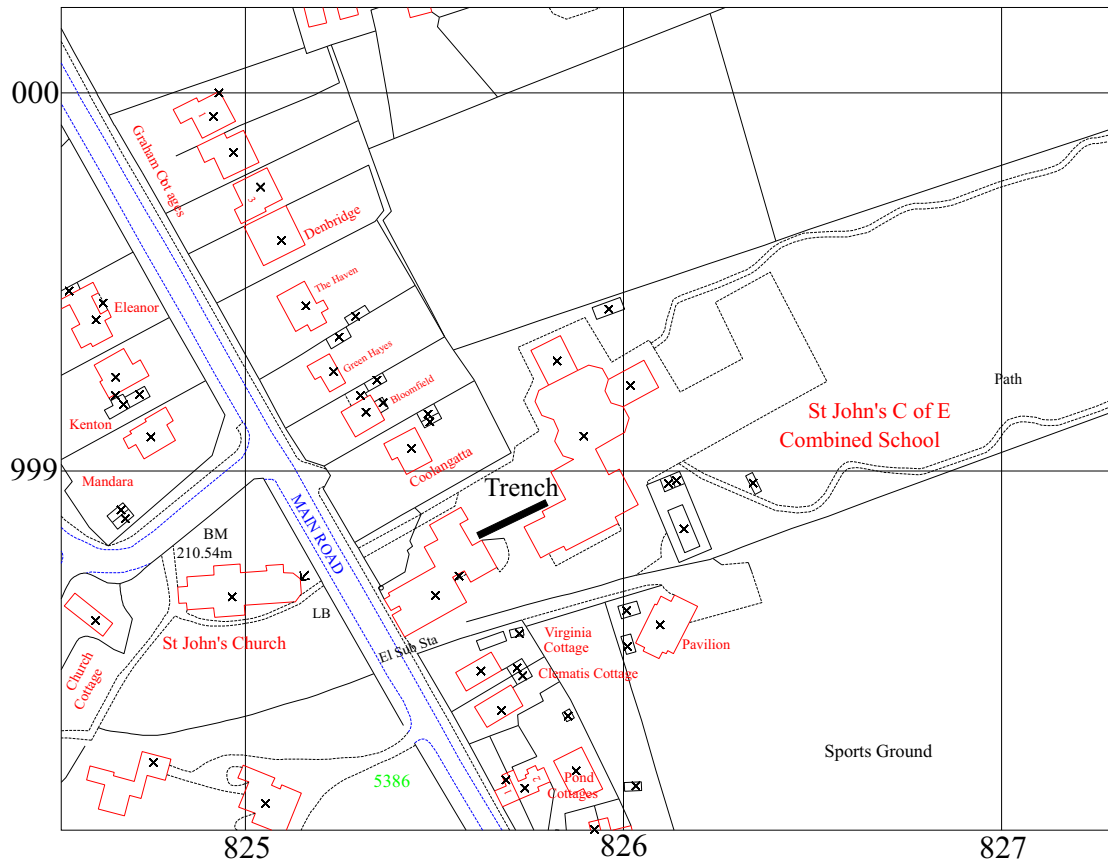
1.2 Planning Background

Wycombe District Council has granted planning permission (07/05701) for the erection of single storey extension, linking two extant school buildings. Due to the potential for archaeological remains of Grim's Ditch – a scheduled monument elsewhere in the Chilterns – to be present on the site Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service (BCAS) advised that a programme of archaeological works should be undertaken due to the site's potential for archaeological remains. A condition was attached to the permission requiring the carrying out of an archaeological evaluation prior to groundworks associated with the new construction. BCAS prepared a Brief for such work in accordance with PPG16 recommending that the site should be investigated by trenching totalling 20m in length. A Written Scheme of Investigation was submitted and accepted which proposed a suitable methodology to satisfy the requirements of the Brief.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The hamlet of Lacey Green was historically located in the parish of Princes Risborough, in the Upper District, in the Chiltern Hills. It does not feature in Domesday. The origin of the name of the settlement, Lacey Green, is disputed; it may be a corruption of the Old English *leasowe* 'pasture' (EPNS, 1925), although Sheahan (1862: 194) prefers that it refers to a family which carried weight locally.

On the Jefferys' map of Buckinghamshire from the 1760s little, except Stocking Farm, is shown at Leasey (Lacey) Green; the settlement on the west side of main road is already present, but not intensive. On August 1st, 1851, the chapelry became an ecclesiastical parish, served by the church of St. John the Evangelist (County Historic Environment Record CAS129900000; SU 82495 99870), built 1825/6. In 1851, the school was also built and opened. It was enlarged in 1885 and 1898, and subsequently in the post-war period, again.



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Figure 1. Site location

To the immediate north of the school site is a farm, currently called Stocken Farm (CAS129950000; SP 82516 00086), historically Stocking Farm, which features on maps since at least the 1760s. The building dates from the late 17th or early 18th centuries, although was modified c. 1840. The farm on the 1820s Inclosure Commissioners map of Risborough parish shows a dispersed group of buildings. The 1878 OS map shows a U-shaped farmyard, facing the main road, as does the later 1885. Several buildings at Lacey Green date from the 17th century onwards. Malmsmead and Malmsmead West (CAS129940000; SP 82515 00215), south of Kiln Barn, have a 17th century core, with much 18th, 19th and 20th century modifications.

Stocken Farmhouse (CAS129950000; SP 82516 00086) to the south is late 17th/early 18th century, with later modifications; the farm barn (CAS129940100; SP 82547 00088) dates from 1830 with much later modifications. West of Main Road, on the present Church Lane, which appears to have existed as a hamlet from at least the time of Jefferys' 1760s mapping of Buckinghamshire are several houses, one of which Well Cottage (CAS129910200; SU 82280 99966) contains a 16th century bay, with 18th, 19th and 20th century modifications. Park Cottage (CAS129910100; SU 82426 99846) and Crown Cottage (CAS129910000; SU 82440 99870) are 19th century in date.

The linear landscape monument Grim's Ditch (CAS0140) extends from Bradenham, just to the south of Lacey Green, to Berkhamsted in the north at least; the schedule for the monument (SAM 35334) describes the short length of 18km from Bradenham to Berkhamsted. Different authorities argue for where it goes from there. It is argued to extend to Pitstone and Ivinghoe (Davis 1981; Davis & Evans 1984) possibly as far north as Dunstable (Dyer, 1963). This section is bivallate.

The monument between Bradenham and Berkhamsted is univallate, and is characterized by a bank and ditch, the bank of which is invariably to the escarpment, the ditch is therefore on the internal side. The monument measures between 6m and 13m across; geophysical survey carried out at Lacey Green showed a 6m-wide feature, excavation carried out at Hastoe generated a 13m-long section across the monument. The section north of Berkhamsted between Pitstone and Ivinghoe is a double ditch c. 35m apart.

The antiquity of the monument of Grim's Ditch (CAS0014004000 Centroid SP 8269 0058 (F3); CAS0014003000 Centroid SP 8261 0042 (F2); CAS0014002000 Centroid SP 8285 9915 (D8)) has been argued extensively by many authorities. In the 1930s OGS Crawford (1931) and Hughes (1931) proposed a Saxon date: the latter arguing for a 6th century border between Saxons and Britons; Dyer (1963) was minded to date it to the early Iron Age – although Whinney & Davis (1973) misrepresent him slightly by attributing it a later date as a tribal boundary thrown up by the Catuvallauni some several centuries later and seven or eight centuries earlier than Crawford. Their work revealed a monument c. 13m wide and a sherd of pot which could not be dated more securely than the pre-Roman or Roman Iron Age.

Overall, the recovery of dating evidence from the monument has been poor, although work carried out near the A41 in the early 1990s might indicate an Iron Age date this far north (Thorn, 1997:6). It is also clear that few sections across the ditch match any other previously examined. Work carried out at Shootersway, above the A41, and two interventions between Pitstone and Ivinghoe Beacon showed dissimilar profiles

for the monument. It is not clear whether the monument between Pitstone and Ivinghoe, which is bivallate, is the same monument as the univallate section of bank and ditch to the south.

Equally, the function of Grim's Ditch is unclear. Earlier writers such as Crawford (1931) and Hughes (1931) saw it as a defensive structure to defend the Briton from the Saxon invader. Nonetheless, more recently the monument has been generally interpreted as a corralling feature, associated with the control and protection of cattle rather than a defensive structure; environmental data appears to indicate clearance and cultivation in the vicinity of the monument (Kidd, 2007). No authority seems to have considered its potential role as ritual monument; for example, separating the wild wood of the Chiltern Clay-with-Flints landscape from that of the tilled and managed Vale of Aylesbury.

The line of Grim's Ditch appears that it should extend through the school playground. It is however possible that the earthwork curved to the west and that Main Road, Lacey Green follows the historic line of the ditch and bank (Network Archaeology, 1999a:13). Kiln Lane to the north does follow to a large extent the line of the dyke, notwithstanding the exaggerated loop it describes to the north, which can probably be associated with brick production.

Geophysical survey (Network 1999) shows a negative feature on the north side of the northern survey area at E1 parallel to Kiln Lane; it is possible that this is an east/west length of the ditch, extending as far west as Main Road, which would then be the historic line of the monument.

Air photographs taken in the late 1940s (CPE/UK 1897 12 Dec 46 #4021 & #3039; CPE/UK 1936 Jan 47 #4037) seem to show a narrow north by northeast/south by southwest darkening in line with the known portion of Grim's Ditch at Grymsdyke Lodge and along the historic line of properties shown on the 1821 map prepared by the Inclosure Commissioners, as well as the later 1st ed. Ordnance Survey maps. The Inclosure map also shows a field boundary which turns to the east just north of Stocken Farm, which is also recorded on Sheet XXXVII. Later air photographs from the 1980s show that much of this area has been built on by extensions to Stocken Farm.

In the immediate vicinity of the proposal site several archaeological interventions have been carried out; the majority have been watching briefs, but a handful of evaluations have also been undertaken, in addition to some geophysical survey. Buckinghamshire County Museum Archaeological Service prepared a report, an Archaeological & Management Survey of Grim's Ditch, Bucks. (Thorn, 1997), which summarised the knowledge to date.

This desk-based assessment was complemented by further reports by Network Archaeology Ltd (1998 and 1999a) the latter of which presented the results of geophysical survey work carried out at two locations to the north of the proposal area, in the immediate vicinity of Stocken Farm; the location was identified as E1 within the report. This comprised a 500m gap in the earthwork between D8, by Grymsdyke Lodge and F1 at Highwood (cf Network 1999b). The bank and ditch at D8 and F1 were poorly visible, having probably been largely reduced and back-filled.

The southernmost investigation at E1 – E1b – yielded data, which might possibly be the bank of the ditch, but this is inconclusive; some possible small negative features to the east of the line of the ditch were also observed, which “could indicate the position of a post-fast structure...to the south of these features are a dispersed number of possible large pits” (Network Archaeology 1999a:13).

The northern investigation E1b revealed negative features within the survey area which appeared to be parallel with Kiln Lane. The survey identified what may be a 6m wide ditch and possible bank, as well as possible positive anomalies associated with putative farm-buildings. The pits at E1b were identified as clay-pits for brick-making; at E1a the negative feature was identified as Grim's Ditch.

A watching brief carried out at Highwood to the east (Network Archaeology, 1999b) observed a significant presence of brick and tile waste in a clay matrix. The dump was not bottomed. At least one of the ponds in the immediate vicinity of Kiln Lane is a former clay-pit, in addition to there having been a number of clay-pits in the vicinity (Network Archaeology, 1999b:4). A chalk-pit (086200000; SP 82662 00513) and a brick kiln (086190000; SP 82537 00236) and works (043980000; SP 82900 00200) are located north of the proposal site.

In 2002 Network Archaeology (2003) carried out an evaluation to the southwest on land between Kiln Lodge and Kiln Barn; this revealed that the monument, though not visible at ground level may have extended this far west. The feature was back-filled in the upper layers with brick-making waste, but seemed to contain some naturally accumulated deposits toward the base, although it was not bottomed.

The ditch contained water-logged deposits at the base, which were undated, although Robert Scaife (Network Archaeology 2003: Appendix B Pollen Analysis) proposes a late prehistoric or even early historic date for the deposit analysed, based on an absence of diagnostic linden pollen. The excavator suggested that the gap observed in Grim's Ditch is not genuine (Network Archaeology, 2003:10).

In 2003 a watching brief was carried out at Kiln Lodge (Fell 2003) but the depth of footings was insufficient to ascertain any information regarding the monument. Thames Valley Archaeological Services carried out an evaluation, c. 60m south of the above sites, at Stocken Farm (Hammond, 2004); no archaeological remains were observed. An investigation carried out by Chiltern Archaeology failed to recover any evidence for the bank of Grim's Ditch (Chiltern Archaeology, 2005).

There are no known prehistoric, Roman or Saxon finds are in the vicinity of the proposal area.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the Written Scheme of Investigation were as follows:

- To gather sufficient information to generate a reliable predictive model of the extent, character, date, state of preservation and depth of burial of important

archaeological remains and associated palaeo-environmental deposits within the area of study.

Specific objectives in respect of this evaluation include the requirements

- To establish the presence or absence of deposits relating to Grim's Ditch or any associated features.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

In response to a *Brief* issued by BCAS a scheme of investigation was designed by John Moore Heritage Services (JMHS) and agreed with BCAS and the applicant. The work was carried out by JMHS on 24th and 25th July, 2008.

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in a *Written Scheme of Investigation* agreed with the BCAS.

The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994) and the principles of MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

3.2 Methodology

A trench of 22m length and 1.6m wide was excavated by a 3-ton excavator using a flat-bladed bucket, supplemented by limited hand investigation of revealed archaeological deposits. Excavation was taken to the top of the natural. Environmental sampling was carried out to achieve the project objectives (English Heritage 1996 & 2002).

Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and sections drawings compiled where appropriate. A photographic record was produced. The trench was backfilled after recording.

4 RESULTS (Figure 2)

4.1 Field results

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in [] indicate features i.e. pit cuts; while numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material.

The east by northeast west by southwest trench (Fig. 2) was excavated to the top of the natural (04); Clay-with-Flints, a yellow to orange brown clay with a significant quantity of loose flint through it. This natural was overlain by a thin deposit of subsoil (03). The subsoil (03) measured c. 0.1m thick and was only present for c. 3.5m at the east end of the trench.

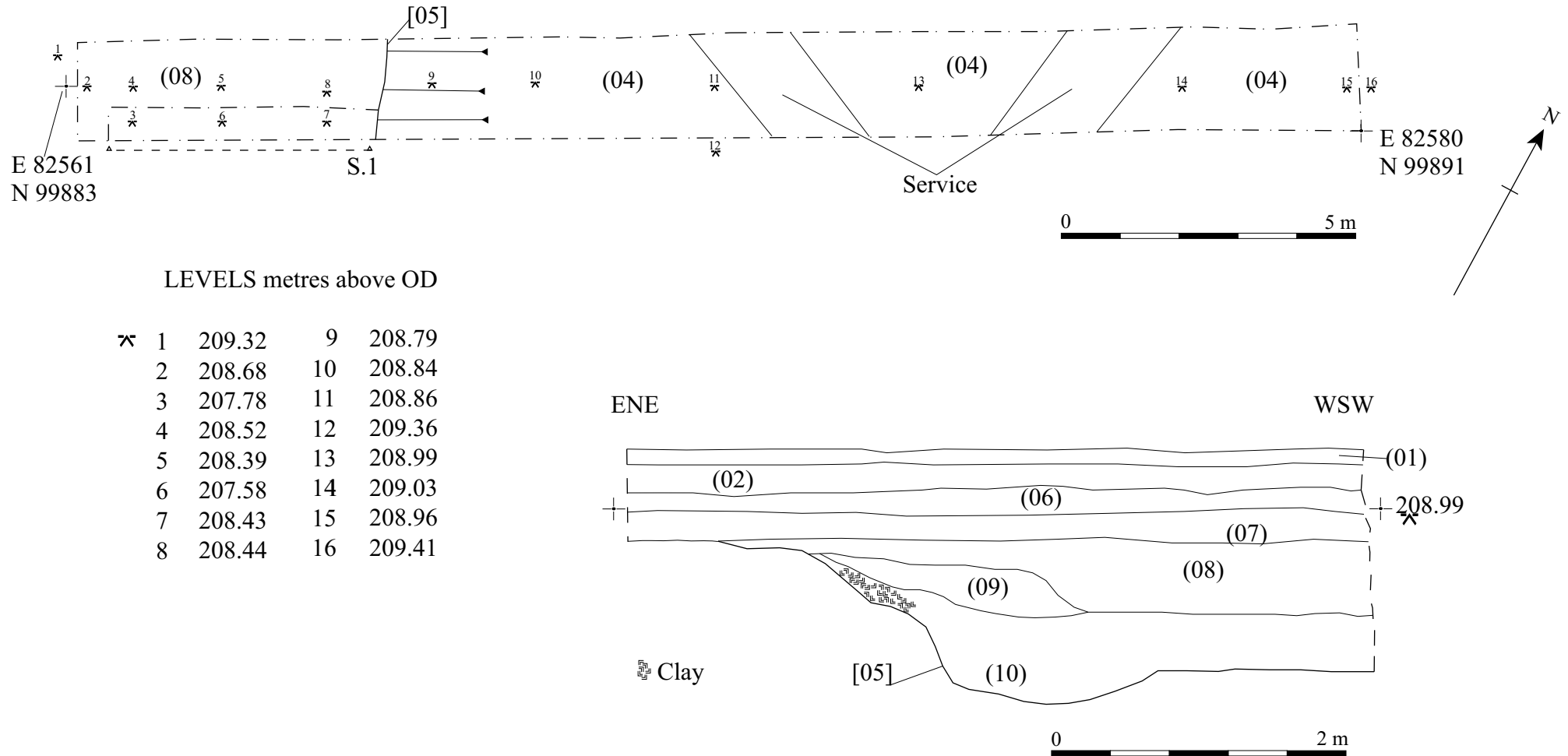


Figure 2. Plan & Section

Service trenches to the west truncated this deposit, and the natural between the two services was overlain by disturbed ground. At the west end of the trench the natural was cut by a large feature [05] with an irregular profile and base (Fig. 2).

The feature was not seen in its entirety, and it was not possible to ascertain whether it was a linear or non-linear feature. Nonetheless, the feature [05] was filled with several deposits, the earliest of which was (10). The deposit (10) was a soft dark orange brown clay silt, with c. 2% mixed flints and occasional patches of clay through it; a single piece of possibly medieval or perhaps more probably post-medieval roof-tile was recovered from this primary deposit.

Overlying the primary backfill (10) was a dump of friable pale brown clay silt (09), containing c. 2% mixed gravels. Sealing (09) was a deposit (08) of moderately stiff pale orange brown slightly silty clay; c. 5% chalk flecking and c. 2% mixed flint were spread throughout the deposit.

A line of buried topsoil (07), friable grey brown silty clay, containing flint, slate and brick sealed the feature [05] and extended c. 6m from the western end of the trench. A redeposited dump of natural orange brown clay (06) with flint gravel formed a bedding layer for the concrete (02) and tarmac (01) of the playground.

4.2 Reliability of Techniques and Results

The evaluation was carried out in excellent meteorological conditions. The tarmac was underpinned by 150-200mm of concrete. To the east, this was relatively easily broken out, to the west it was extremely dry and hard. At the end of the first day it became apparent that in order to understand the nature of the cut exposed it was necessary to extend the trench; it was therefore extended by 2m. Services and site constraints prevented further investigation to the west.

5 FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS

5.1 Finds

Three contexts yielded finds: (03), (07) and (10).

Approximately 200g of a single piece of brick with a dull orange/reddish brown fabric, containing ironstone and flint inclusions was recovered from context (03). Mortar was on one of the faces.

Three fragments of brick with an orange fabric weighing 65g were recovered from (07). A piece of slate weighing 20g was also taken from this deposit.

A fragment of tile, weighing 25g, with a bright orange fabric and flint inclusions was recovered from behind the section-edge while taking environmental sample within the primary fill (10) of the cut feature [05].

5.2 Environmental Remains

Deposit (10) was sampled but no carbonised remains were present in the deposit.

6 DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation was carried out with a particular objective of establishing the presence or absence of deposits relating to Grim's Ditch or any associated features. The evaluation was inconclusive. The feature exposed yielded tile from the medieval or post-medieval period from its primary fill. It is indeed possible that the monument was open and maintained and that this tile fragment dates the beginning of the abandonment of the stretch between sections D8 and F1 (Network Archaeology 1998). Alternatively, it is possible that the line of the ditch swings to the west at D8, and followed the line of the current Main Road, Lacey Green, turning to the east at Kiln Lane, where it has been investigated on several occasions (Network Archaeology, 1999b; Network Archaeology, 2003; Chiltern Archaeology, 2005). A further alternative is that the perceived gap here, between D8 and F1, is an actual break in the line of the monument. Certainly work carried out by Hammond (2004) at Stocken Farm failed to evidence the monument.

Clearly, it is not defensive structure; the bank is on the escarpment side of the monument. The argument for its being a territorial boundary would be predicated on it being available for defence, even if it were never used to such an end. The potential for it being defensible is crucial; it is not and therefore a different interpretation must be sought.

Sandy Kidd notes that the monument may comprise several earthworks, with those to the north around Pitstone a separate monument (Kidd, 2007:4). Here, the bivallate monument seems to follow the hill's contours. By contrast, the sections to the south, between the Saunderton and Wendover gaps, and the Wendover and Berkhamsted gaps may well form a single monument, comprising an escarpment-side bank and ditch within. The molluscan and pollen data indicate open grassland, although these samples have been taken from sites either in the gaps, away from the monument in the heights of the Chilterns, or at Ivinghoe, which may well not be the same monument.

The work carried out by Davis (1981) published the section of the monument at Hastoe. This shows a steep-sided ditch, with an external bank, measuring c. 13m wide. A single sherd of Iron Age pottery was recovered. This section of the monument was located in the uplands of the Chilterns, approximately 2kms north of the Middle Iron Age hillfort at Cholesbury Camp; the Iron Age hillfort of Boddington Camp is located approximately 2kms north of the monument 5kms east of this intervention. It is located on a promontory at c. 250m OD. To the southeast at Shootersway on the A41, a further four sherds of Iron Age pottery were recovered (Thorn, 1997:5), although the site is unpublished.

Over its whole length from Bradenham to Berkhamsted, Grim's Ditch seems to be present only between 235m OD and 175m OD, defining the break of slope. It has not been observed in the northwest/southeast gaps which form the main accesses and routes through the Chilterns; despite Thorn (1997), showing it crossing the A413, the Ordnance Survey (1998) does not show it between Hunt's Green and Prestwood.

Sandy Kidd (2007:5) suggests that the monument was "constructed in open countryside to constrain and contain herds driven up the minor dry tributary valleys running up from the Wye and Chess respectively from straying onto (or being poached from) the Chiltern scarp". Too little is known of the other earthworks – the

'cross ridge dykes' – at Whiteleaf and elsewhere, to establish the relationship between these and Grim's Ditch. Equally, too little is known of the environment of the Chiltern uplands to assess accurately the degree of clearance which had been carried out over the Late Bronze Age and former part of the Iron Age.

It is possible that some of the apparent gaps in the monument are indeed deliberate, and part of the monument. If this is the case, the absence between D8 and F1 of any linear feature – bank or ditch – is not surprising. The geophysical survey (Area E1b) carried out by Network Archaeology (1999a) to the north of the current proposal site failed to show any linear feature; the potential activity revealed was some possible pitting and a linear negative anomaly aligned broadly north, but approximately 50m east of the proposed line of the monument. It is not likely to be part of Grim's Ditch. If there are gaps built into the structure of the monument, then its function as a successful means of corralling cattle or preventing raiding is questionable. Further work is needed on the environment of those sections located in the upland parts of the Chilterns to assess whether the same open countryside predominated here during the Iron Age as is evidenced in the Vale of Aylesbury (Davis 1981).

The feature sampled during the evaluation bears closer resemblance to a brick pit rather than a ditch. Clearly, too little of the feature was revealed to be absolutely certain, and indeed it is equally possible that the ditch might have been recut by opportunist excavation for clay for brick-making. That the Inclosure Map of 1823 shows field boundaries along the proposed line of the monument is good evidence for the proposed line of the monument; later Ordnance Survey maps from 1878 and 1885 show that these field boundaries have been removed. There is no evidence for brick pits on the maps, nor is there any evidence for earthworks.

The results of the evaluation are inconclusive. No evidence of prehistoric activities was recovered during the evaluation; the only archaeology observed was probable clay-digging for brick-making, which was extensively carried out at Lacey Green in the post-medieval period. In the absence of evidence for Grim's Ditch, it is possible that there is a real gap here in the monument as neither geophysical survey nor other evaluation work (Hammond, 2004) have located a bank and ditch between D8 and F1.

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1823 Inclosure Map**OS Maps Consulted**1878 1:2 500
1885 1:10 560**APPENDIX I****CONTEXT TABLE****APPENDIX – ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY**

Context	Type	Description	Depth	Width	Length	Interpretation
01	Tarmac	Black tarmac	0.1m	>1.7m	>22m	School playground
02	Base	Concrete; moderately soft at east end, very hard at west end	0.15m	>1.7m	>22m	Concrete base
03	Subsoil	Greyish brown clay silt	0.15	>1.7m	c. 3.5m	Subsoil
04	Natural		Unk.	>1.7m	>22m	Natural
05	Cut	Irregular profile and base; only eastern edge revealed	1.1m	>1.7m	c. 4m	Cut feature; not clear whether linear or pit. Most likely clay-pit.
06	Fill	Friable brown orange clay & 2% gravel	c. 0.5m	>1.7m	>22m	Clay bedding layer; redeposited natural.
07	Fill	Friable grey brown silty clay; flint, slate and brick in fill	0.10m	>1.7m	<5.5m	Buried topsoil
08	Fill	Moderately stiff pale orange brown slightly silty clay; chalk 5%, flint 2%, <1% charcoal	0.17m	>1.7m	>4m	Fill of [05]
09	Fill	Friable clay silt, pale brown c. 2% flint	c. 0.3m	>1.7m	c. 1.8m	Fill of [05]
10	Fill	Soft dark orange brown clay silt; 2% rough flint, tile	c. 0.6m	>1.7m	>3.8m	Primary fill of [05]