

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

OF

LAND AT BRIMPTON,

WEST BERKSHIRE

(NGR SU 5578 6482)

On behalf of

CgMs Consulting

December 2008

REPORT FOR CgMs Consulting
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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services conducted an archaeological evaluation of the proposed development site on 4th December 2008. A single T-shaped trench, totalling approximately 20 metres in length, was excavated to reveal the underlying natural geology. Archaeological deposits were very limited. A medieval gully, or truncated ditch, as well as post-medieval field drains and postholes relating to a contemporary fence line were located.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The Application Site is some 0.13ha in area and lies on the northern edge of the village of Brimpton (NGR SU 5578 6482). The eastern Boundary of the site is formed by Brimpton Road with Crookham Common Road forming its southern boundary. The Application Site lies toward the higher ground on the west side of the Enbourn Valley and is relatively flat, lying at c. 80m Above Ordnance Datum.

The British Geological Survey (Sheet 268, 1971) indicates that the underlying geology of the Application Site is London Clay. No geotechnical investigations have been undertaken on the site. However, archaeological excavations undertaken to the immediate north indicated 200mm of topsoil overlying a 0.15m thick grey-brown sandy silt subsoil (Hindmarch, 2002). The natural is described as a brown clay with gravel patches.

1.2 Planning Background

A planning application (Reference 07/02272/FULD) was submitted for the erection of a single dwelling. West Berkshire Archaeology Service, who provide West Berkshire District Council with advice on archaeological matters relating to planning, have identified the site as having archaeological potential. They have requested that an archaeological evaluation is undertaken to establish the presence or absence of archaeological features or deposits within the proposal site. This work has been carried out to inform the planning process, and is in line with PPG16 and Local Plan Policy.

1.3 Archaeological Background

Ermin Street crosses the Kennet Valley less than a kilometre to the north of the village, and there are at least three cropmark sites of straight-sided and linear features suggesting Roman occupation between Brimpton and this road.

No archaeological work has been undertaken within the site in Modern times. However, a Roman hypocaust system was identified in the early 20th century (MWB3691). The presence of the under floor heating system is usually indicative of a high status building such as villas or bath houses. Further evidence for Roman building material is recorded within St Peter's Church, where Roman tile is included within its walls (Lobb and Rose 1996, 90). However, the provenance of this material is uncertain as it may have come from the Roman town of Silchester, which lies only 7km to the southwest.

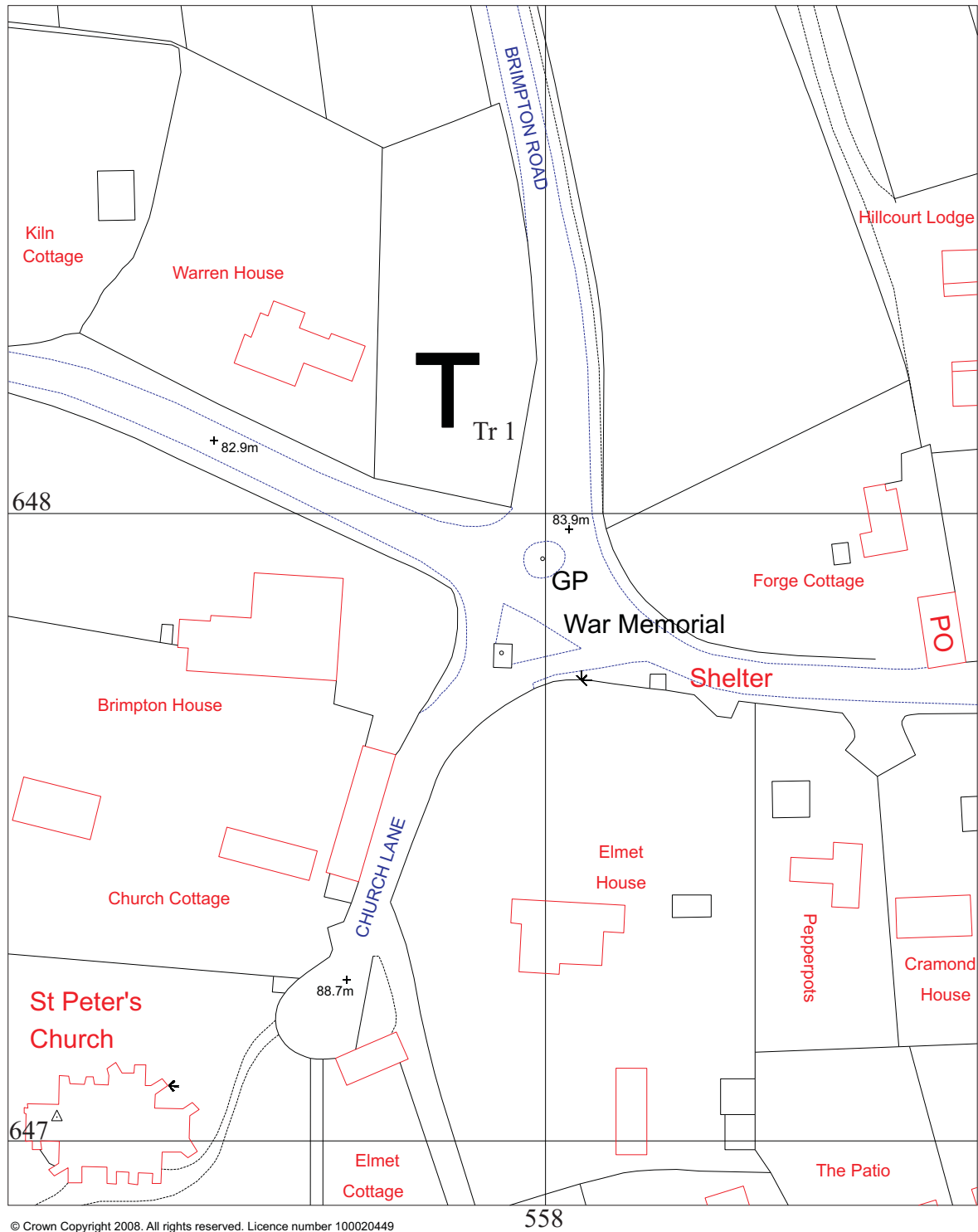


Figure 1. Site and trench location

An archaeological evaluation, comprising both geophysical survey and trial trenching, was undertaken on the site to the immediate north of the Application Site. The results of the work produced no evidence for Roman activity, high status or otherwise. Indeed no evidence for any archaeological activity from any period was encountered.

Outside of the Roman period, Bronze Age Barrows are present in the south of the parish. Brimpton is recorded as a settlement in the 10th century, when Saxon charters confirm the granting of land to Thegn Ordulf by King Edmund. The village is also mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086 (Ford 2005). However, the Application site lies outside of the historic core of the village and it is unlikely that settlement remains pertaining to these periods will be encountered.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- To determine as far as reasonably practicable, the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains.
- To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features encountered.

In particular:

- Establish to presence and character of any Roman remains.
- Undertake an appropriate level of archaeological analysis, reporting and dissemination of the results

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

A Written Scheme of Investigation was prepared by CgMs and agreed with West Berkshire Archaeology Service on behalf of West Berkshire Council, and the applicant. The work was carried out by JMHS and involved the excavation of a trial trench across the site (Fig. 1).

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the *Written Scheme of Investigation*. The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1999) and the procedures laid down in MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

3.2 Methodology

The trenching sample required was achieved through the excavation of a single T-shaped trench, totalling 20m in length situated within the footprint of the proposed building. It was 1.6m wide and was excavated by a 3 tonne excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. The resultant surfaces were cleaned by hand prior to limited hand excavation of any identified archaeological deposits.

Standard JMHS 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 trenches were backfilled after recording.

4 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.

4.1 Excavation Results (*Figure 2*)

The lowest deposit recorded was the natural associated with the London Clay comprising mottled grey-brown to orange-brown clay with gravel patches (1/03).

A line of three postholes was noted. These probably formed a fence line. Noticeable within the fill of these postholes was flint rubble packing against the edges, with a very loose centre.

Cut	Dimensions (m)	Depth (m)	Fill
1/10	0.48 dia	0.25	Dark grey silt-clay (1/11)
1/12	0.55 dia	0.35	Mid grey silt-clay (1/13)
1/14	0.3 dia	0.12	Brown-grey silt-clay (1/15)

A further three postholes were also noted. These were not fully excavated due to localised flooding in the trench.

Cut	Dimensions (m)	Depth (m)	Fill
1/04	0.3 dia	0.1+	Grey-brown silt-clay (1/05)
1/16	0.41 dia	0.1+	Mid grey silt-clay (1/17)
1/18	0.52 dia	0.11	Dark grey silt-clay (1/19)

Four linear features were noted. The first 1/06 was 0.22m wide and over 1.6m long. It was filled with a dark brown-grey silt-clay (1/07) and aligned N-S. The second 1/08 was 0.22m wide and over 0.6m long. It was filled with a dark brown-grey silt-clay (1/09) and aligned NW-SE apparently joining 1/06. Due to localised flooding these were not fully excavated, but are probably field drains.

The other two linear features were aligned E-W. The first 1/20 of these was 0.4m+ wide, over 1.6m in length and 0.25m deep with sides of roughly 60° and a flat base. The fill was a dark grey silt-clay (1/21) which had a very high concentration of small flint nodules at the centre of the base and a sherd of post-medieval pottery. This is probably an early-type of French drain and was cut by posthole 1/12.

The other 1/22 was 0.5m wide and 0.15m deep with sides of roughly 60° and a flat base. It was filled with a dark brown-grey silt-clay (1/23).

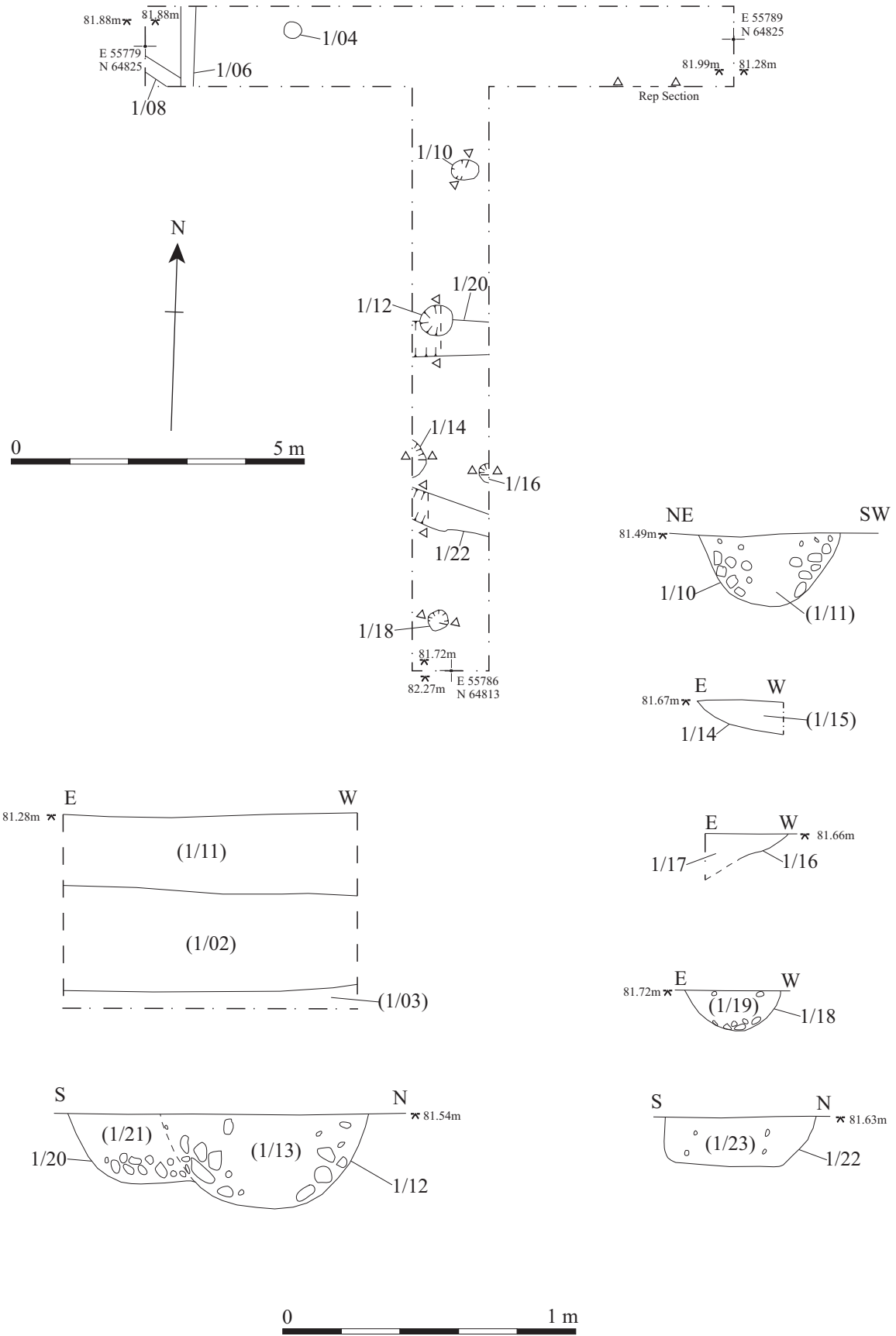


Figure 2. Plan and sections

These features were sealed with 0.2m of dark grey-brown silt-clay (1/02) that contained the occasional charcoal fleck. The uppermost layer was a dark grey-brown clay-loam (1/01) topsoil that was between 0.2m and 0.3m thick.

4.2 Reliability of Techniques and Results

The reliability of results is considered to be good even though the evaluation took place during a period of extremely wet conditions. The day the work took place was fine and dry. However, ground water and flooding of parts of the trench was a problem. This did make working conditions within the trench somewhat difficult.

5 FINDS

5.1 Pottery (*By Paul Blinkhorn*)

The pottery assemblage comprised 5 sherds with a total weight of 154g. It comprised wares of early medieval and early post-medieval date.

EMW: Local fine sandy ware, ?Late 11th – ? 14th century. A range of fine sandy fabrics, probably from a number of unknown sources, similar to those noted at the Reading Waterfront excavations (Underwood 1997, 144). 1 sherd, 34g.

NBA: Newbury coarsewares, late 11th – early 15th century (Mephram 1997, 51-2). Flint, sand and shell tempered ware, probably manufactured in the Savernake Forest (ibid. 65). It has a wide distribution throughout Berkshire, northern Hampshire and Oxfordshire (ibid. fig. 29). 1 sherd, 98g.

GRE: Glazed Red Earthenware, mid 16th century +. Fine sandy earthenware, usually with a brown or green glaze, occurring in a range of utilitarian forms. Such 'country pottery' was first made in the 16th century, and in some areas continued in use until the 19th century. Probably a product of the potteries at Inkpen, four miles to the west of Newbury and a coarser variety has been sourced at Ashton Keynes, on the Berkshire Downs (Vince et al 1997). 3 sherds, 22 g.

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 1. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*. The medieval assemblage comprised a large sherd from the base of a jar in EMW which was heavily sooted, and the rim and spout from an extremely unusual long-spouted bowl in Newbury coarseware. The sherds were both large and in very good condition, indicating that there was earlier medieval activity in the immediate vicinity of these excavations.

Table 1: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

Tr	Cntxt	EMW		NBA		GRE		Date
		No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
1	11					1	11	M16thC
1	17					1	5	M16thC
1	21					1	6	M16thC
1	23	1	34	1	98			L11thC
	Total	1	34	1	98	3	22	

5.2 Lithics

Numerous pieces of thermal fractured flint were noted from the topsoil (1/01) including a single burnt flake.

5.3 Environmental Remains

Due to the nature of the deposits encountered no environmental samples were taken.

6 DISCUSSION

No evidence for any Roman activity was recorded during the evaluation. A small gully or perhaps truncated ditch containing medieval pottery was located. This may represent an early field boundary. A roughly parallel gully of post-medieval date was considered to be a French drain; it is therefore quite possible that the earlier one also served this purpose.

All other features were either post-medieval, or undated but likely to be of a similar date. A posthole off the alignment of the fence line also contains post-medieval pottery, which reinforces this theory.

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APPENDIX – ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
Trench 1			0.5	1.6	10 x 10		
1/01	Layer	Topsoil	0.3	Tr	Tr	CBM	Modern
1/02	Layer	Dark grey-brown silt-clay	0.2	Tr	Tr		
1/03	Natural	Mottled clay and gravel	-	Tr	Tr		
1/04	Cut	Posthole	0.1+	0.3	0.3		
1/05	Fill of 1/04	Grey-brown silt-clay	0.1+	0.3	0.3		
1/06	Cut	Gully	-	0.22	1.6		
1/07	Fill of 1/06	Brown-grey silt-clay	-	0.22	1.6		
1/08	Cut	Gully	-	0.22	0.6		
1/09	Fill of 1/08	Brown-grey silt-clay	-	0.22	0.6		
1/10	Cut	Posthole	0.25	0.48	0.48		Post-medieval
1/11	Fill of 10	Dark grey silt-clay	0.25	0.48	0.48	Pottery	Post-medieval
1/12	Cut	Posthole	0.35	0.55	0.55		
1/13	Fill of 1/12	Mid grey silt-clay	0.35	0.55	0.55		
1/14	Cut	Posthole	0.12	0.3	0.3		Post-medieval
1/15	Fill of 1/14	Brown-grey silt-clay	0.12	0.3	0.3		
1/16	Cut	Posthole	0.1+	0.41	0.41		
1/17	Fill of 16	Mid grey silt-clay	0.1+	0.41	0.41	Pottery	Post-medieval
1/18	Cut	Posthole	0.11	0.52	0.52		
1/19	Fill of 1/18	Dark grey silt-clay	0.11	0.52	0.52		
1/20	Cut	Gully	0.25	0.4	1.6		
1/21	Fill of 1/20	Dark grey silt-clay	0.25	0.4	1.6	Pottery	Post-medieval
1/22	Cut	Gully	0.15	0.5	1.6		
1/23	Fill of 1/22	Brown-grey silt-clay	0.15	0.5	1.6	Pottery	Medieval