

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

AT

HEATHROW BIRD CENTRE,

STAINES RD,

WRAYSBURY, BERKSHIRE

NGR TQ 0025 7371

On behalf of

Blue Wing Properties Ltd

OCTOBER 2010

REPORT FOR	Blue Wing Properties Ltd Orchard House St Annes Hill Road Chertsey KT16 9NN
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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services conducted an evaluation at the Heathrow Bird Centre, Wraysbury, Berkshire (NGR TQ 0028 7371) prior to the construction of a bungalow. The site lies on one of the Thames gravel terraces, which have in the past produced abundant archaeological features and finds. The evaluation trench uncovered the remains of a ditch and a post-hole.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development site is located at the Heathrow Bird Centre, Wraysbury, Berkshire (NGR TQ 00287371). The site lies between 16-18m OD. The underlying geology is the Sheperton Gravel (first terrace) of the Thames.

1.2 Planning Background

Windsor and Maidenhead Borough Council granted planning permission for the erection of a bungalow (ref. 07/02/02445). Due to the archaeological and historical importance of the gravel terraces of the Thames attached to the permission was the requirement of an evaluation prior to construction work commencing on the site. This was in line with PPG 16 (the planning policy current at the time) and other Local Planning policies.

1.3 Archaeological Background

Gravel extraction at various times in and around Wraysbury has shown that the gravel terraces attracted people in prehistoric times with continued occupation through the Roman and early medieval periods. Excavations in the 1980s at Manor Farm, 350m to the north, identified occupation of the prehistoric, Roman and early medieval periods (HER ref. 00036.00.000). Gravel quarrying at Kingsmead, Horton, and Poyle have shown similar multiphase activity sites. The site of the Heathrow Bird Centre is known to lie in an area of cropmarks (*Berkshire Archaeology* communication). On the site a linear feature with two vague semicircular attachments were identified on aerial photographs (HER ref. 03326.00.000). To the west further cropmarks occur, representing a prehistoric field system, with an irregular enclosure and possible pitting (HER ref. 01079.00.000).

Robert Gernon held the manor of Wraysbury in 1086 (Morris 1978, 20.1) assessed at 20 hides. There were 32 villagers, 18 smallholders, 7 slaves, 2 mills, 4 fisheries in the Thames and woodland for 500 pigs. Edmund, a thane of King Edward, had previously held the manor. The Domesday Book reference is the oldest recognised recording of the name, *Wirecesberie*, and this with later forms, *Wyredeberia* 1209-19, have given rise to a suggested etymology of *Wigræd's burh* or fortification (Mawer and Stenton 1925, 244-5). The fortification must have lain around the church to the north of the Heathrow Bird Centre site.

The manor passed to the king after the death of Rober Gernon (VCH 1925, 320-5), and then passed to a barony the caput of which was at Stansted Mountfitchetin in

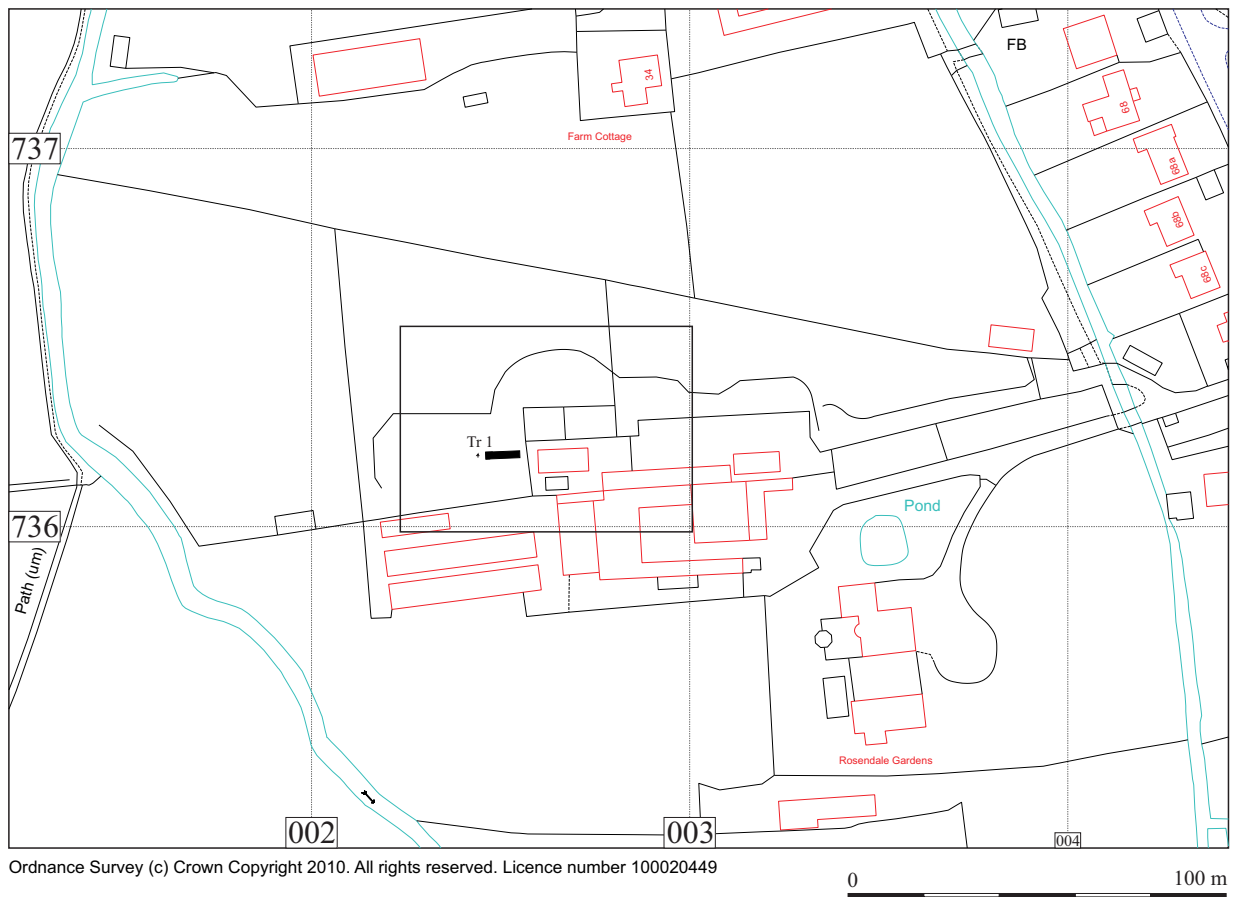


Figure 1. Site location

Essex. It later returned to the king and his manor of Windsor. A second manor was established in Wraysbury called Remenham Manor in the 13th century, and a third the manor of Cow or Cokke in the 17th century.

The church passed to Gloucester Abbey, and was held by them until the dissolution of the monasteries c. 1540. The rectory is reported as holding land in 1231 (VCH 1925, 320-5). The church had two chapels, one at Colnbrook is recorded in 1342 (VCH 1925, 248) and the church of Langley Marish is assessed with Wraysbury church in 1291 (VCH 1925, 300, 325). A Benedictine priory was founded in the parish at Ankerwycke with an estate in 1160 (VCH 1925, 320-5).

The parish was inclosed in 1799 when allotments were made for the numerous gravel pits in the parish (VCH 1925, 320-5).

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- To identify and record any archaeological remains exposed in the course of the evaluation.

In particular:

- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered.
- To determine the degree of complexity of the horizontal and/or vertical stratigraphy present.
- To assess the associations and implications of any remains encountered with reference to the historic landscape.
- To determine the implications of the remains with reference to economy, status, utility and social activity.
- To determine or confirm the likely range, and quality of the artefactual evidence present.
- To assess the ecofactual and environmental potential of the archaeological features and deposits.
- To determine the impact of the proposed development on any remains present.
- To address some of the key issues highlighted in the Solent Thames Research Framework. This will depend on the type of date of remains encountered.
- To inform the need for, and scope of, further phases of work to mitigate the impact of the proposed development.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with *Berkshire Archaeology* (BA) the archaeological advisors to

Windsor and Maidenhead Borough Council. Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and section drawings compiled where appropriate and possible.

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute for Archaeologists (1994).

3.2 Methodology

A single evaluation trench 9m long by 1.7m wide was excavated across the proposed site of the new bungalow using an excavator equipped with a toothless bucket.

4 RESULTS (Figure 2)

4.1 Palaeolithic

The natural (1/08) was a friable brown-yellow gravel with sand lenses. Discolouration was noted in some areas on the surface, but investigation showed that higher levels of iron ore occurring in the gravel beds created the brown and red deposits.

4.2 Undated Features

The remains of two unrelated features were cut into the natural gravel deposits. These included a possible linear ditch 1/07, with a northeast to southwest orientation, extending into the west end of the trench. This was over 1.17m in width and 0.6m in depth. The visible side of this cut had steep sides that were concave and becoming more gradual towards the base. It was suggested that this was a linear ditch, but the other side was not seen, an alternative is that this was a gravel pit. There were two fills; the lower fill (1/06) was a highly compact mid-grey brown clay silt deposit 0.25m deep with numerous flint nodules throughout, the upper fill (1/05) was a loosely compact yellow-brown clay silt 0.33m deep with occasional flint nodules.

The other feature was a posthole 1/04, which was of a circular shape 0.15m deep and 0.3m in diameter. The sides were steep and the base flat. The fill (1/03) was a compact brown yellow silt clay with the remains of a possible post pipe in shadow. A tree throw pit was seen in the surface of the gravels.

4.3 Modern

Deposit (1/02) was a moderately compact yellow brown silt clay with some gravel inclusions 0.15m deep. This was interpreted as the subsoil. Sealing this was deposit (1/01) a moderately compact brown black sand silt 0.45m deep, which was interpreted as the topsoil. Below the surface there were lenses of gravels and tarmac that may indicate some dumping or features (for example cages).

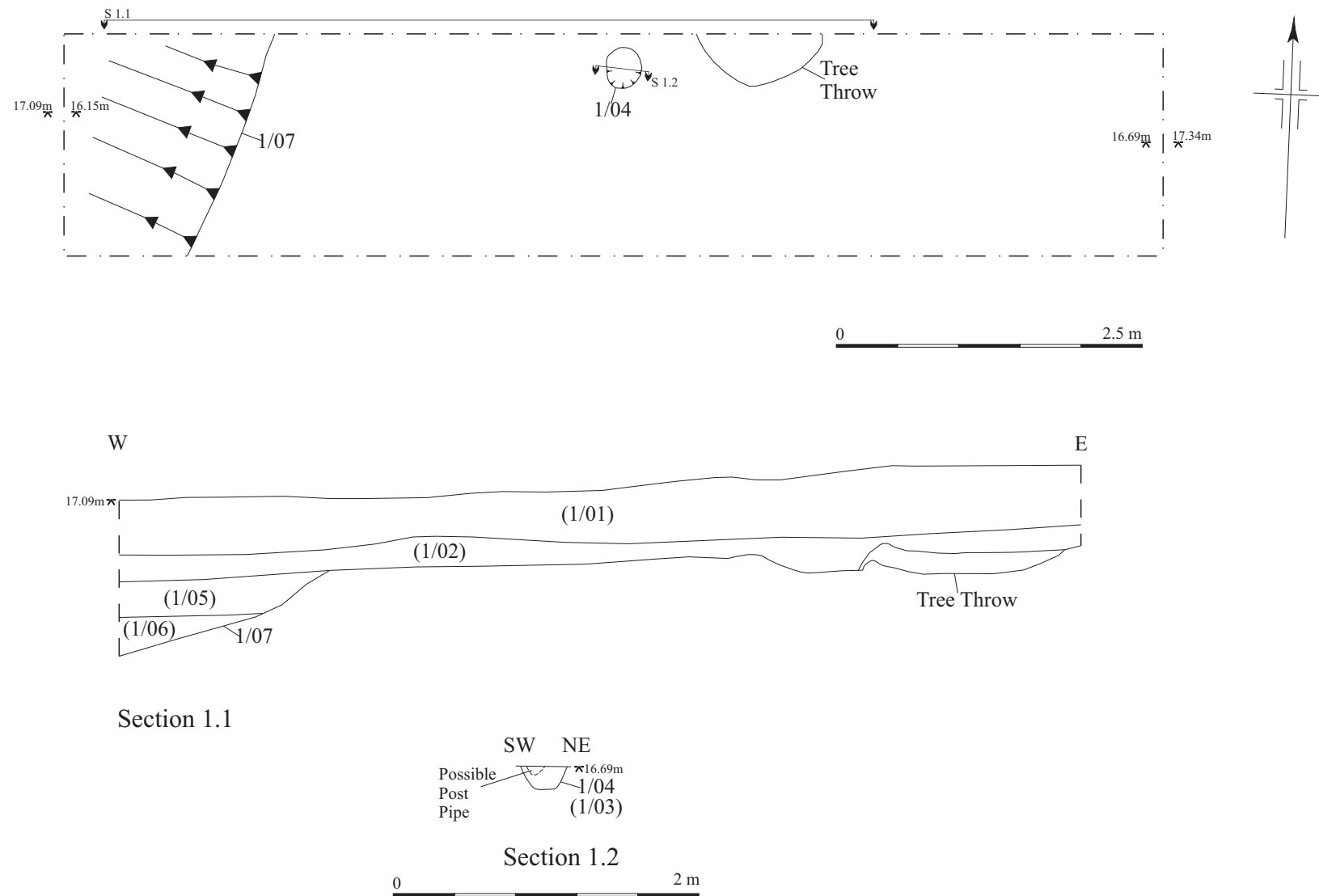


Figure 2. Trench 1 plan and sections

5 FINDS

No finds were recovered to date the features, and no environmental samples taken.

6 DISCUSSION

The evaluation identified the remains of archaeological features cut into the remains of the Sheperton Gravel (first terrace) at Wraysbury on the site of the Heathrow Bird Centre. This consisted of a posthole and a possible ditch or quarry pit. As no finds were recovered it is difficult to provide phasing. If a ditch it has to apply to a period when minimal material remains were in use, if a quarry pit it could be post-medieval in date.

There are two proposed phases for the development of the site, the first of which comprises the digging of the foundations for the external walls of the bungalow. It has been proposed that this occurs before the end of October when the present planning permission expires (an accompanying *Written Scheme of Investigation* is provided). A second phase of development is proposed for the later insertion of service trenches after the end of October, both of these activities require monitoring for archaeological remains.

7 ARCHIVE

Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

Paper record

The project brief
Written scheme of investigation
The project report
The primary site record

Physical record

Finds

The archive currently is maintained by John Moore Heritage Services and will be transferred Reading Museum.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Institute of Field Archaeologists, 1999 Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs

Mawer, A and Stenton, F M 1925 The Place-Names of Buckinghamshire, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Morris, J 1978 The Domesday Book: Buckinghamshire, Chichester: Phillimore

VCH 1925 A History of the County of Buckinghamshire: volume 3, London: Saint Catherine's Press

ID	Type	Description	Depth	Width	Length	Finds	Interpretation	Date
Trench 1								
1/01	Deposit	Moderately compact, brown black, sandy silt	0.45				Topsoil	
1/02	Deposit	Moderately compact, yellow brown, silt clay with some gravel inclusions	0.15				Subsoil	
1/03	Deposit	Compact, brown yellow, silt clay with possible remains of post-pipe	0.15	0.3			Fill of posthole	Undated
1/04	Cut	Circular, with steep sides and a rounded base, with vertical inclination	0.15	0.3			Posthole	Undated
1/05	Deposit	Loosely compact silt deposit with occasional flint nodules	0.33				Second fill of ditch	Undated
1/06	Deposit	Highly compact, mid-grey brown, silt deposit with numerous flint nodules	0.25				Primary fill of ditch	Undated
1/07	Cut	Linear with an initial sharp break of slope with steep sides, but gradually becoming less steep, base may not have been reached in the trench	0.6+	1.7+			Ditch	Undated
1/08	Deposit	Friable brown yellow gravel, areas of the gravel appeared more red in colour which was probably caused by deposits of iron ore in the gravel					Natural, Sheperton Gravel Terrace	Palaeolithic