

BURGHFIELD (BE)

MLV88

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

MILL ROAD NORTH, BURGHFIELD
BERKSHIRE

SU 676 707

OCTOBER 1988

MILL ROAD NORTH, BURGHFIELD

INTRODUCTION

Background Information

An archaeological assessment of the site was undertaken by the Oxford Archaeological Unit on behalf of Amey Roadstone Corporation to provide information for a proposed planning application for gravel extraction.

The area of some six hectares is bounded to the north and west by the Kennet and Avon Canal, to the south by Mill Road, and to the east by the buildings of the former Burghfield Farm.

Archaeological Background

Aerial photographs and work undertaken by the Trust for Wessex Archaeology have revealed a late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age Barrow cemetery in the field immediately to the south of the proposed application area. Prehistoric pit groups and an extensive scatter of flint tools also occur in this field.

A ditched enclosure, now known to be of Roman date, lies immediately south of Mill Road.

Strategy

Excavation of a 2% sample of the area was proposed. It quickly became apparent that the northern part of the site had been too wet for any possible human occupation. After discussion with Paul Chadwick (Archaeological Officer - Berkshire County Planning Department), the sample in the northern part was reduced. This resulted in a 1.12% sample being excavated by a JCB using a 5ft ditching bucket.

The trenches varied in length from 15m to 46m with 3m long holes being dug in the northern part. Trenches were excavated down to either natural gravel or well down into the alluvial sequence - post glacial deposits as seen elsewhere ie Holy Brook Farm.

A field walking exercise was not undertaken as the west field lay under stubble and the eastern paddocks were under pasture.

THE RESULTS

The Floodplain

The majority of the west field (c 85%), the north-eastern and south-eastern paddocks lay in the floodplain and are still liable to flooding today. Trenching over the area produced an alluvial sequence of up to 2m in depth. The colour horizons in the alluvium were felt to reflect soil processes rather than being of archaeological significance. These silts now mask a previous landscape, an irregular surface of banks left as the Kennet moved across the flood plain.

The area between the banks was found to contain a fine blue compact silt - very clay like, as was found at Holy Brook Farm further up the valley. Again, like Holy Brook Farm, the ground surfaces forming on the banks were found to vary, being sandy or silty and having a greater or lesser vegetation and snail content.

Remnants of stream channels were found in several trenches; Trench 1 continuing into Trench 2, Trench 4, Trench 5 and Trench 14.

The only feature of archaeological interest seen on the flood plain area during the evaluation was a small pit in Trench 5. 0.50m in diameter and 0.30m deep, this pit contained a layer of burnt flint and charcoal as its primary fill. Sealed by c 0.50m of alluvium it was cut into the side of a low bank. No direct dating evidence was recovered but the soil into which it was cut is similar to Bronze Age deposits at Holy Brook and the flint would be consistent with such a date.

The only finds recovered from the west field were from the modern ploughsoil in Trench 3. Several tile fragments and one pot sherd of post-medieval date were recovered.

In Trench 14 a deposit of ox bone was found. This was located beside an old stream course and not deposited in any feature. It is lying within the alluvial sequence and is probably the skeleton of an animal which died in situ.

Gravel Terrace

In the west field, the Southern strip and adjacent paddock to the East were substantially higher and must mark the edge of the most recent river valley. A drainage ditch skirted the area to the North (see Fig 3). This ditch seen in Trenches 7, 8, 9, 17, was up to 2m wide and 1.4m deep. It had been cut into the side of the gravel terrace with its upcast (seen in Trench 7) thrown onto the flood plain. Prior to the evaluation work the ditch showed as a shallow earthwork. A road surface ran near to the edge of the terrace. This was formed by compacted flint, soil and tar. The road lay right on the edge of the terrace in Trench 7, but 4m away from the edge in trench 8. It was 10m wide and mostly lay under the ploughsoils. In Trench 7 part of the road surface had eroded into the adjacent ditch. The road probably ran to Burghfield Mill before the present field system was rationalised and Mill Road straightened.

Seasonal flooding has brought the level of the flood plain almost up to the level of the terrace. However further artificial levelling has also taken place: dumps of gravel overlying some alluvium and under the modern ploughsoil were located in Trenches 10 and 11. This action was designed to form a more gentle slope from the terrace to the flood plain.

Summary

The area which was evaluated produced evidence of braided streams and a sequence of alluvial deposition. The only evidence of human activity, with the exception of post Medieval field boundaries and a road was a single small pit on the flood plain of possible Bronze Age date.

The ditched enclosure in the field to the south of Mill Road does not extend into the evaluation area.

John Moore
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Fig 1 General location 1:50,000

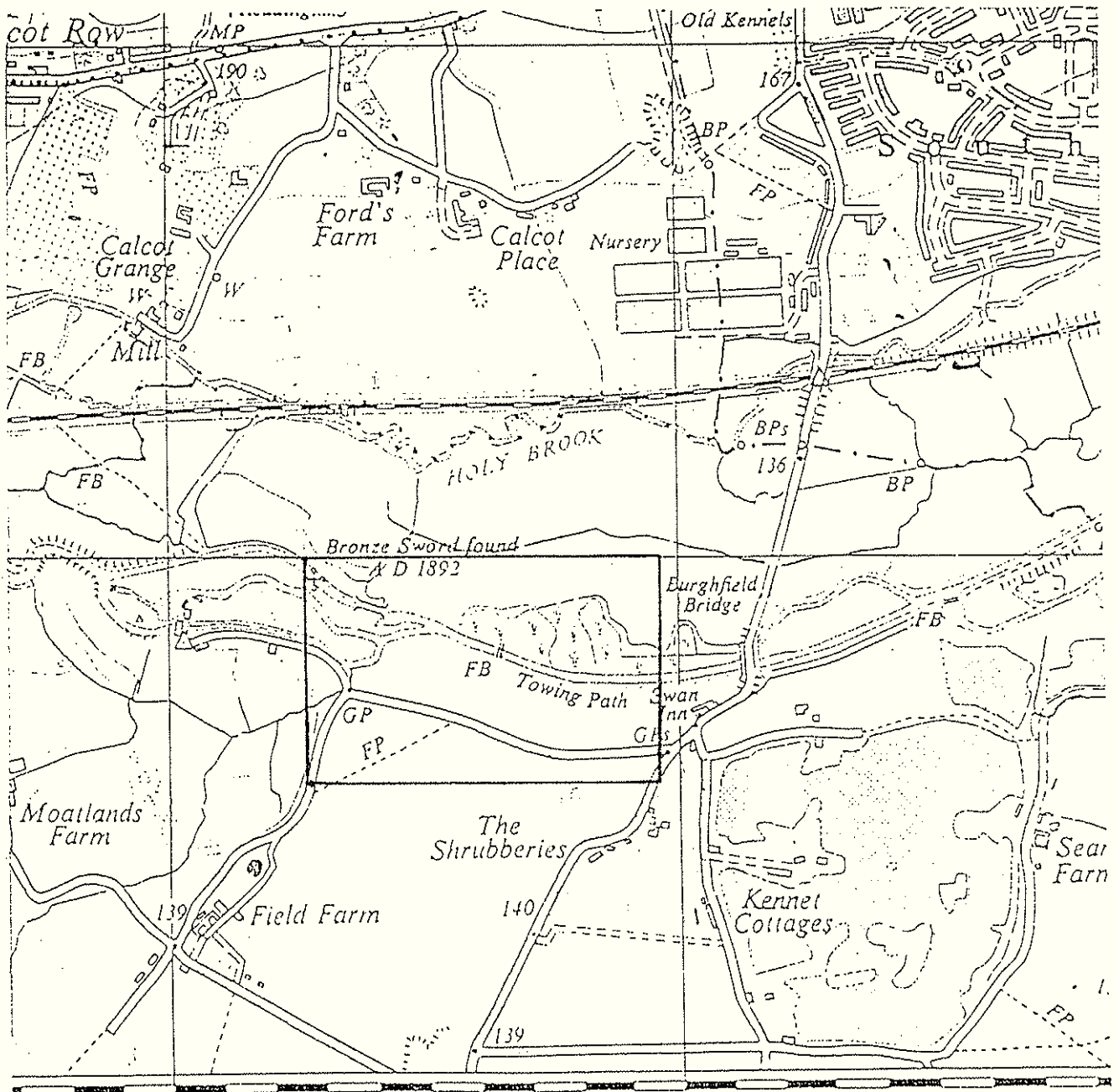


Fig 2 Assessment area

