# Snowball Hill Maidenhead Berkshire



Archaeological Evaluation Report



October 2013

# Client: The Alexander Devine Children's Hospice Service

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# Snowball Hill, Maidenhead, Berkshire

Archaeological Evaluation Report

Written by Steve Leech and Tim Allen

with contributions from Geraldine Crann and Sharon Cook and illustrated by Leo Heatley and Markus Dylewski

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#### Summary

Between the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> of September 2013 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological evaluation by trenching for Edgington Spink & Hine on behalf of the Alexander Devine Children's Hospice Service at Snowball Hill, Maidenhead, Berkshire (NGR SU 8650 7845). The site is an open field presently under cultivation, and the area significantly affected by the proposed development covers an area of approximately 0.3 ha (excluding tree-planting). The evaluation consisted of four trenches 15m long and 1.6m wide and one trench 20m wide. The trenches were targeted upon areas likely to be subject to significant disturbance during the development, including areas of tree planting.

Excavation of the trenches revealed a single pit at the south-western end of the affected area, and three furrows orientated east – west in one other trench.

The base of the pit, only part of which lay within the trench, was reddened, suggesting burning in situ. The base of the pit was covered by a layer of oak charcoal, itself covered by a layer of ashy clay, and the pit had then been backfilled with redeposited natural. A few small flint chips were recovered that might have been worked, although this was not certain, so the pit remains undated.

The furrows had been heavily truncated by later ploughing, and were extremely shallow. Two were found in one trench, indicating that they were spaced about 10m apart. No dating evidence for the furrows was found.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA), was commissioned by Edgington Spink & Hine to undertake a trial trench evaluation prior to construction of an Alexander Devine Children's Hospice at Snowball Hill, Maidenhead, Berkshire (the site), in accordance with Condition 6 of the planning permission (11/02269).
- 1.1.2 The site of the proposed development is located on the south-west side of Maidenhead (Fig. 1), east of Woodlands Park and south-west of Lillibrooke Manor (NGR SU 8650 7845). Its western boundary is formed partly by Snowball Hill, and partly by the Woodlands Park Business Park. The land to the south and east is open ground, with woodland (Shrubbery Copse and Great Thrift Wood) some 250 m to the south-east.
- 1.1.3 The scope of the evaluation was indicated by Fiona Macdonald in discussion with Tim Allen, and Oxford Archaeology prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (OA 2013) detailing how OA would carry out the work. This WSI was approved by Fiona Macdonald of Berkshire Archaeology, and subsequently by Diane Charlton, Principal Planning Officer Windsor and Maidenhead.

# 1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site itself is currently used as arable. It sits at just under 30m aOD, and is relatively level. The general trend of the topography is a slight slope from higher ground to the north-west (Littlewick Green) angling down gently towards the southeast. The lowest ground is occupied by the woodland to the south and east, and south of Shrubbery Copse there is a ridge of slightly higher ground with two small knolls.
- 1.2.2 The geology is Sedimentary clay, silt and sand of the Lambeth Group, except at the south-west end, where the underlying geology is Seaford Chalk and Newhaven Chalk. Alluvium overlies the Lambeth Group sediments some 200m south and east of the site (BGS Geology of Britain online 2013).

# **1.3** Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background to the site has been provided by Fiona Macdonald, supplemented by information on designated sites in the surrounding area, and previous known investigations. The area has a long history of human activity, which is summarised below.
- 1.3.2 No Mesolithic sites (8500-4000BC) are known close to the site (within 1km), but an important site producing both Early and Late Mesolithic flint work was found at Holyport 2.5km to the east (Ames 1993), and is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 1006974).
- 1.3.3 An Early Neolithic shaft (4000-3300BC) was found at Cannon Hill just north-east of Holyport (Bradley *et al.* 1975-6), and an area of Late Neolithic (2900-2500BC) and Early Bronze Age (2500-1600BC) flint-working activity is known at Maidenhead Thicket, some 2km to the north and north-west (Boismier 1995). There is also a surviving Bronze Age bowl barrow there (SAM 1007945). More recently, Neolithic and Bronze

Age features have been found at Heynes Green, just 900m to the north-east (Macdonald pers. comm.).

- 1.3.4 Just over 2km to the west of the site at Feens Farm, Littlewick Green (BHER: ERM1308), cropmarks of a rectangular enclosure and a trackway are known, and geophysical survey by the Berkshire Archaeological Research Group has located two roundhouses of probable Iron Age date. At the north end of Maidenhead Thicket is Robin Hood's Arbour, an earthwork enclosure of late Iron Age date (SAM 1006978; Alwyn Cotton 1961).
- 1.3.5 Two Roman villas are known in the vicinity, the Cox Green villa at the west end of Northumberland Road, 1.2km to the north-north-east (Bennett 1962), the other a probable building at Burchett's Green (BHER:ERM765) just over 4km to the north-west. Roman pottery was also recovered from Littlewick Green some 3km to the north-west.
- 1.3.6 No Early Medieval sites are known in the area of the site, although Heywood Manor to the west is recorded in documents from AD940.
- 1.3.7 The site is less than 500m from Lillebrooke Manor, a 14th century hall house with associated buildings, and Heywood Farm is a similar distance to the south. Both of these contain a number of Grade 2 Listed Buildings. About 1km to the east is Ockwell Manor, where there are further Listed Buildings.
- 1.3.8 Historic maps indicates that the study site has been open fields within the last 200 years, and may have been wooded before that, as it is shown as part of a belt of trees linking Maidenhead Thicket and Great Thrift Wood on William Smith's map of 1815 and on Rocque's Map of Berkshire 1761.

## 1.4 Acknowledgements

1.4.1 The evaluation was carried out by Stephen Leech, Nick Swift and Rupert Lotherington of Oxford Archaeology, and was managed by Tim Allen. We would like to thank Steve Hessey of Edgington Spink & Hine and Fiona Macdonald of Berkshire County Council for enabling the archaeological work to be undertaken.

# 2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

## 2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The specific aims and objectives of the evaluation were:

- (i) To determine the presence or absence of any archaeological remains which may survive.
- (ii) To determine or confirm the approximate extent of any surviving remains.
- (iii) To determine the date range of any surviving remains by artefactual or other means.
- (iv) To determine the condition and state of preservation of any remains.
- (v) To determine the degree of complexity of any surviving horizontal or vertical stratigraphy.
- (vi) To assess the associations and implications of any remains encountered with reference to the historic landscape.
- (vii) To determine the potential of the site to provide palaeoenvironmental and/or economic evidence, and the forms in which such evidence may survive.
- (viii) To determine the implications of any remains with reference to economy, status, utility and social activity.
- (ix) To determine or confirm the likely range, quality and quantity of the artifactual evidence present.
- (x) To provide sufficient information to enable the archaeological curator to decide whether further archaeological mitigation will be needed or not

# 2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 A summary of OA's general approach to excavation and recording can be found in Appendix A of the WSI. Standard methodologies for geomatics and survey, environmental evidence, artefactual evidence and burials can also be found in the WSI (OA 2013, Appendices B, C, D and E respectively).
- 2.2.2 The site covered an area of 2.2ha., but much of this was laid to grass. Archaeological evaluation was confined to the areas subject to significant disturbance from development, an area of approximately 0.3ha.
- 2.2.3 A sample evaluation of five trenches 1.6m wide, one 20m long, the others 15m long, was agreed with Fiona Macdonald, Principal Archaeologist for Berkshire Archaeology. The proposed trench layout is shown in Figure 2.
- 2.2.4 Trenches were excavated and backfilled using a JCB with toothless ditching bucket under close archaeological supervision.
- 2.2.5 Environmental/organic samples were taken where appropriate.

# 3 Results

# 3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

3.1.1 The following section summarises the results of the evaluation. The location of the trenches, and of the features found, is shown on Figure 2, and detailed plans of the trenches containing archaeological remains on Figure 3. Representative sections of trenches are shown on Figure 4. Detailed archaeological descriptions are presented in the context inventory (Appendix A), and within the descriptive text where they are integral to the interpretation of the context in question.

# 3.2 General soils and ground conditions

- 3.2.1 All the trenches (1 to 5) had a grey / brown silty clay ploughsoil 0.3m thick.
- 3.2.2 Underlying the plough-soil was the natural yellow / brown clay with frequent flint gravel inclusions.
- 3.2.3 The trenches were opened up in dry conditions, allowing clear observation of any potential archaeological features.

# 3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits

Apart from a small pit in Trench 1, there were no archaeological deposits other than furrows present in any of the trenches.

# 3.4 Trench 1 (Figs 3 and 4; Plates 1 and 2)

- 3.4.1 Trench 1 was orientated east–west. It was 1.6m wide and 15m long, and contained an oval pit 102 cut into the natural clay and overlain by the ploughsoil.
- 3.4.2 Pit 102 was only partly revealed within the evaluation trench. It was 1.3m wide (eastwest), at least 0.86m north-south and 0.3m deep, with sloping sides and a flat base. The eastern half of the base had been reddened by burning, but not the western half or the sides. The lowest fill (103) was a dark grey-black silty loam with abundant charcoal and was 0.16m thick. It was overlain by a whitish-grey ashy clay with red flecks and occasional reddened lumps (104) 0.08m thick. This was overlain by a third fill (105), a yellow-brown clay similar to the surrounding natural, but including charcoal and ashy flecks. The upper part of this layer had been reworked by ploughing. No finds were recovered from the fills during hand-excavation, but chips of possibly struck flint were recovered from sieving the environmental sample taken from layer 103. Examination of the charred remains showed that these consisted entirely of oak charcoal.

# 3.5 Trench 2 (Figs 3 and 4; Plate 3)

- 3.5.1 Trench 2 was orientated NE–SW, and was 1.6m wide and 15m long. It contained two furrows (202 and 204) cut into the natural clay and overlain by the ploughsoil. Both of the furrows were orientated east–west, and were approximately 10m apart (centre to centre).
- 3.5.2 Furrow 202 was 1.3m wide but only survived 0.02m deep. It contained a single fill of yellow-brown silty clay, and was without finds.
- 3.5.3 Furrow 204 was 0.9m wide, and was not excavated. It contained a single fill of yellowbrown silty clay, and no finds were seen in the surface.



# 3.6 Trench 3 (Figs 3 and 4; Plate 4)

- 3.6.1 Trench 3 was orientated north–south, and was 1.6m wide and 15m long. It contained one furrow orientated east–west, cut into the natural and overlain by the ploughsoil.
- 3.6.2 Furrow 302 was 1m wide and 0.04m deep. It contained a single fill of yellow-brown silty clay, and was without finds.
- 3.6.3 The natural consisted of flint gravel with patches of yellow-brown clay.

# 3.7 Trench 4 (Plate 5)

3.7.1 Trench 4 was orientated east-west, and was 1.6m wide and 15m in length. It was devoid of any archaeology below the ploughsoil, the natural being flint gravel with yellow-brown clay in patches.

## 3.8 Trench 5 (Plate 6)

3.8.1 Trench 5 was orientated north-south, and was 1.6m wide and 20m long. It was devoid of any archaeology below the ploughsoil, the natural being patchy flint gravel and yellow-brown clay.

## 3.9 Finds and environmental summary

- 3.9.1 No artefacts were recovered from any of the trenches during hand excavation, although several small flint chips were recovered from a 20 litre soil sample taken from the charcoal-rich fill (103) of pit 102 in trench 1.
- 3.9.2 A significant quantity of oak charcoal was recovered from layer 103, but no other charred plant remains.

# 4 DISCUSSION

## 4.1 Reliability of field investigation

4.1.1 The initial machining and recording of the trenches was carried out in dry conditions and there was nothing that might have biased or prejudiced the conclusions of the evaluation.

## 4.2 Interpretation

- 4.2.1 Only a single pit and three furrows were present within the trenches (see Fig. 2).
- 4.2.2 The furrows in Trenches 2 and 3 shared a common orientation, and may well have belonged to one phase of agricultural activity, probably medieval or post-medieval. All of the furrows had been heavily truncated by ploughing and only survived 0.02m 0.04m deep.
- 4.2.3 No trace of any furrows was found in Trenches 4 and 5 further upslope, but given their shallowness in the other trenches, it is probable that any furrows in Trenches 4 or 5 would have been entirely ploughed out.
- 4.2.4 The single pit found in Trench 1 showed evidence of burning on the base, perhaps suggesting that a fire was lit within it, and that the overlying charcoal and ash may have derived from *in situ* burning. It is also possible that the reddening on the base occurred as a result of hot charcoal being dumped into the pit, but these seems less likely, as the area of reddening did not cover the whole of the base, although the charcoal did.
- 4.2.5 The spread of charcoal right across the base of the feature, well beyond the limits of the burning, strongly suggests that this was not the result of the burning of a post *in situ*, as the environmental report tentatively suggested, since in this case the post, and the burning, would have been surrounded by soil or other packing materials. Although some burnt flint was evident at the edges of the pit when first exposed, this was not sufficient to constitute deliberate packing.
- 4.2.6 The charcoal consisted entirely of oak, but this is unlikely to have resulted from the grubbing out and firing of an oak tree, as the excavated part of the feature had a regular shape, profile and a flat base, which is not generally characteristic of tree-throw holes. The choice of oak as fuel was clearly deliberate.
- 4.2.7 The separation of charcoal from the ashy deposit above is fairly clear-cut, which may not be consistent with an ordinary bonfire, although the yellow-brown clay overlying the ashy deposits suggests that the pit was backfilled with the material dug out of it very soon after the burning had taken place. It is alternatively possible that the oak was being burnt for some more specific purpose such as the production of charcoal.
- 4.2.8 The dating of this activity is currently uncertain. Due to the fact that the underlying geology, at least upslope of Trench 1, is flint gravel, the flint chips need not have been man-made.

# 4.3 Evaluation objectives and results

- 4.3.1 The specific aims and objectives of the evaluation were:
  - *(i)To determine the presence or absence of any archaeological remains which may survive.* A single pit and three furrows were identified within the trenches.



- (*ii*) To determine or confirm the approximate extent of any surviving remains. The evaluation trenches were widely spaced, but the only evidence of possible archaeological activity was confined to Trench 1.
- (iii) To determine the date range of any surviving remains by artefactual or other means. The date of the pit in Trench 1 is uncertain, as the flint chips need not be man-made. Charcoal is however available for radiocarbon dating if deemed necessary.
- *(iv) To determine the condition and state of preservation of any remains.* The furrows in Trenches 2 and 3 were poorly-preserved, and the ploughsoil in Trenches 4 and 5 came down directly onto flint gravel at shallow depth, suggesting that truncation by ploughing in these areas has been severe. The pit in Trench 1 was better-preserved, and was cut through some depth of natural clay over the gravel.
- (v) To determine the degree of complexity of any surviving horizontal or vertical stratigraphy. No vertical stratigraphy other than within the single feature was found, and there were no intercutting features.
- (vi) To assess the associations and implications of any remains encountered with reference to the historic landscape. Nothing useful can be said on the basis of the limited remains.
- (vii) To determine the potential of the site to provide palaeoenvironmental and/or economic evidence, and the forms in which such evidence may survive. The environmental evidence consisted of charcoal of a single species. The preservation of charcoal found was clearly good, but this information was limited to a single pit, whose date is uncertain.
- (viii) To determine the implications of any remains with reference to economy, status, utility and social activity. Nothing can be said on the basis of current information.
- (*ix*) To determine or confirm the likely range, quality and quantity of the artifactual evidence present. The only possible finds were flint chips, and these may have been of natural origin.
- (x) To provide sufficient information to enable the archaeological curator to decide whether further archaeological mitigation will be needed or not. The scale of evaluation was determined by the archaeological curator, and all of the required trenches were successfully investigated.
- •

# 4.4 Significance

- 4.4.1 The results suggest that archaeological features are not widespread on this site, and that in the area where the development will have the greatest impact, truncation by ploughing is likely to have been severe. The absence of residual finds in the trenches also supports the view that there is little archaeological potential in this area.
- 4.4.2 The only feature of possible interest was found in Trench 1, but this is undated, and so its significance remains unclear.

# APPENDIX A. TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1							
General d	escription		Orientation	า	E-W		
				Avg. depth	ı (m)	0.3	
	ontaining one / ploughsoil.	e small	pit cut into	o the natural clay and	Width (m)		1.6
overiain by	, ploughoon.				Length (m)	)	15
Contexts							1
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date	
100	Layer	-	0.3	Topsoil	-	-	
101	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-	
102	Cut	-	0.30	Pit	-	-	
103	Fill of 102	1	0.16	Pit fill	? flint chips, burnt flint		
104	Fill of 102	1.1	0.08	Pit fill	-		
105	Fill of 102		0.06	Pit fill	-		

Trench 2							
General d	lescriptio	n			Orientat	ion	NE-SW
			Avg. dep	Avg. depth (m)			
Trench co overlain b	•		Width (m)		1.6		
	, picagilo	0		Length (m)		15	
Contexts							
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date	
200	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-	
201	Layer	-	0.3	Topsoil	-	-	
202	Cut	1.3	0.02	Furrow	-	-	
202	CIII	1.2	0.02	Eurrow fill			



Trench 3							
General d	lescriptio	n	Orientat	N-S			
			Avg. dep	oth (m)	0.3		
Trench co overlain b	•		Width (n	1.6			
	, ploagilo	<b>U</b> II.		Length (m)		15	
Contexts							·
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date	
300	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-	
301	Layer	-	0.3	Topsoil	-	-	
302	Cut	1	0.04	Furrow	-	-	
303	Fill	1	0.04	Furrow fill			

Trench 4								
General d	lescriptio	n	Orientat	ion	E-W			
			Avg. depth (m)					
Trench de natural of		Width (m)		1.6				
	ciay.				Length (m)		15	
Contexts								
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date	date	
400	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-	-	
401	Layer	-	0.3	Topsoil	-	-		
-	-	-	-	-	-	-		



Trench 5								
General d	lescriptio	n	Orientatio	n	N-S			
			Avg. dept	0.3				
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of ploughsoil overlying a natural of clay.						Width (m) 1.6		
	oldy.			Length (m) 20		20		
Contexts							·	
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date		
500	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-	-	
501	Layer	-	0.3	Topsoil	-	-		
-	-	-	-	-	-	-		

# APPENDIX B. FINDS REPORTS

## B.1 Struck flint

By Geraldine Crann

## Description

- B.1.1 Three small flint chips, made from pale grey, mid-grey and black flint, were recovered from sieving of environmental sample 1 from context 103, the lowest fill of pit 102.
- B.1.2 The flint chips were in a rolled condition, total weight 1g. One fragment burnt flint weighing 9g was also recovered.

#### Discussion and recommendations

- B.1.3 It is possible that all three chips result from flint working, but given the variety in raw material and their rolled condition, it is equally likely they were formed as a result of natural processes.
- B.1.4 The assemblage is of low potential and requires no further work. Having been recorded the burnt flint may be discarded.

# APPENDIX C. ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTS

# C.1 Environmental samples

By Sharon Cook

## Introduction

C.1.1 Sample <1> was taken from layer 103, the lowest fill of pit 102.

## Aims

- C.1.2 Sampling was undertaken to:
  - Determine whether ecofacts and environmental evidence (such as plant remains, animal bone, human bone and molluscs) are present and interpretable.
  - Determine the quality, range, state and method of preservation of any ecofactual evidence.
  - Recover and identify any small artefacts.
  - Make further recommendations about sampling for future excavations at the site.

## Methodology

- C.1.3 Fifteen litres of this 20L sample was processed by water flotation, primarily for the recovery of charred plant remains (CPR), using a modified Siraf style flotation machine. The flot was collected on a 250µm mesh and the heavy residue sieved to 500µm; both were dried in a heated room, after which the residue was sorted by eye for artefacts and ecofactual remains.
- C.1.4 The dried flot was scanned for charred plant remains using a binocular microscope at approximately x10 magnification.
- C.1.5 Seed identifications were made with reference to Oxford Archaeology's reference collection. Nomenclature for the plant remains follows Stace (2010). Charcoal identification was carried out by Sheila Boardman.

#### Results

- C.1.6 Sample <1> (103) was a very dark grey silty loam (10YR 3/1) with patches of a strong brown clay. A single fragment of burnt flint and some possible fragments of flint debitage were recovered from the residue. The sample yielded approximately 1.2L of flot material of which 10% was scanned.
- C.1.7 The flot is almost entirely composed of charcoal, although some modern plant material including fine roots is present; a proportion of the charcoal is larger than 4mm. Fifty fragments of charcoal were examined and identified as oak (Quercus sp.); the majority is heartwood and includes a mixture of dense and wide growth rings. Some sapwood is also present, but no roundwood was seen despite an extensive search. No identifiable seeds were noted in the scanned portion.



C.1.8 The inorganic finds from the sample will be included in the finds compendium for the site.

## Discussion

C.1.9 This sample proved to be extremely rich in well-preserved charcoal. This, plus the lack of charred seeds, is likely to be an indication that the sample comes from the remains of a fire. It is also possible that this is the remnants of an oak post burnt *in situ*. There are a few pieces of sapwood which may be suitable for radiocarbon dating although it should be noted that the wood may still be a few decades older than the deposit (Sheila Boardman pers. comm.)

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

C.1.10 The flot from sample <1> was very rich in charcoal, so despite the lack of other plant materials charred remains are evidently well preserved at the site. Any future excavations should incorporate a sampling policy in accordance with the most recent sampling guidelines (e.g. Oxford Archaeology 2005 and English Heritage 2011).



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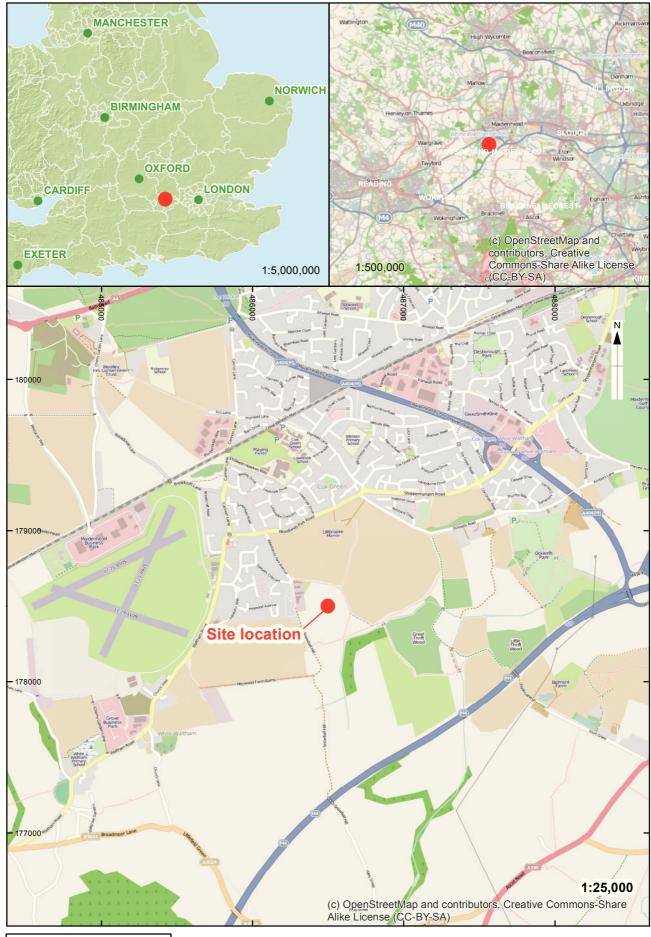
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# APPENDIX E. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name:	Snowball Hill, Maidenhead, Berkshire
Site code:	WWAD 13
Grid reference:	SU 8650 7845
Туре:	Evaluation
Date and duration:	4th-6th September 2013
Area of site:	2.2 ha overall, 0.3 ha will be affected by significant development

**Summary of results:** The site is currently a ploughed field. Evaluation was carried out in advance of the construction of an Alexander Devine Children's Hospice. Five trenches 1.6m wide, four of them 15m long and the fifth 20m long, were excavated across the site by JCB under archaeological supervision. An undated pit containing evidence of burning on the base, and filled with layers of charcoal, ash and then redeposited natural, was found at the south edge of the site. Two other trenches contained the highly truncated remains of east-west furrows, those in one trench 10 m apart, but no dating evidence was seen. There were no other archaeological features or finds.

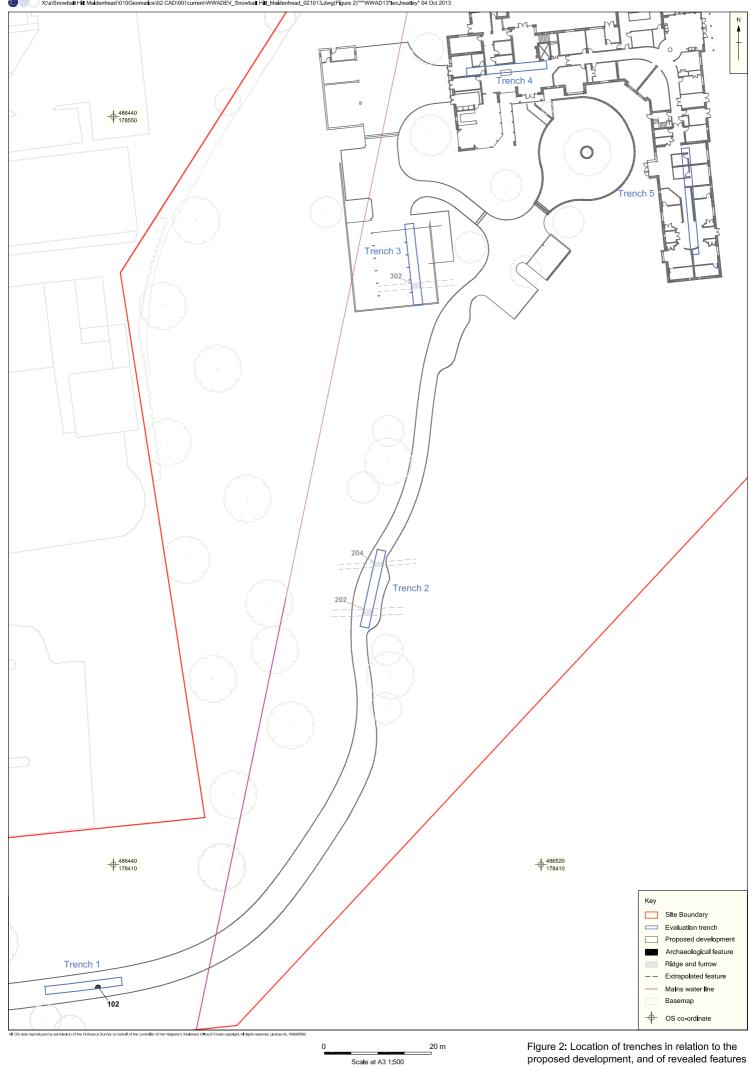
**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with an appropriate museum in Berkshire in due course. Accession number tbc...



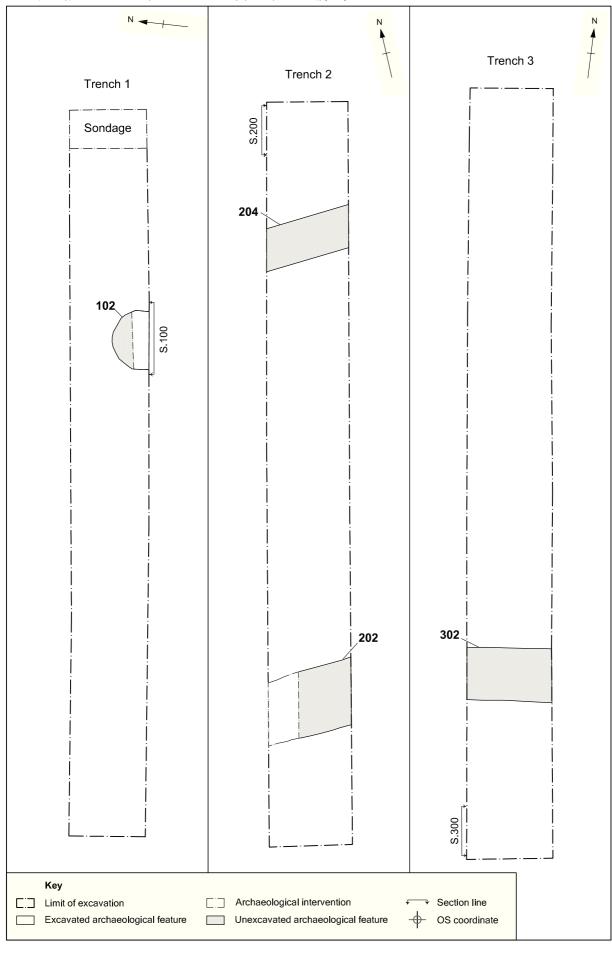
Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2012

Figure 1: Site location

. X:s\Snowball Hill Maidenhead/010Geomatics\02 CAD\001current\WWADEV\_Snowball Hill\_Maidenhead\_021013.dwg(Figure 2)\*\*\*WWAD13'leo.heatley\* 04 Oct 2013



Scale at A3 1:500



5 m



0

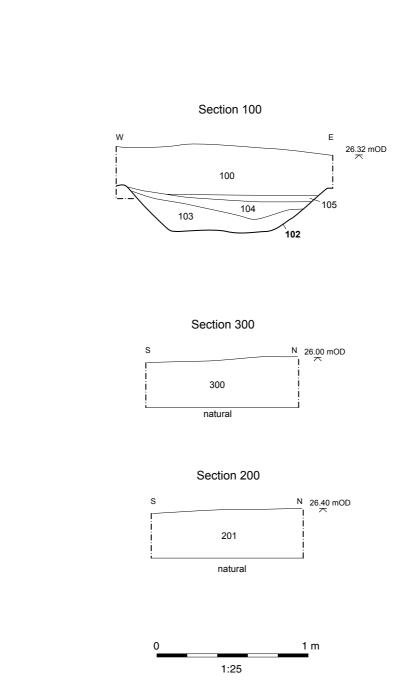




Plate 1: Trench 1 as machined, looking west

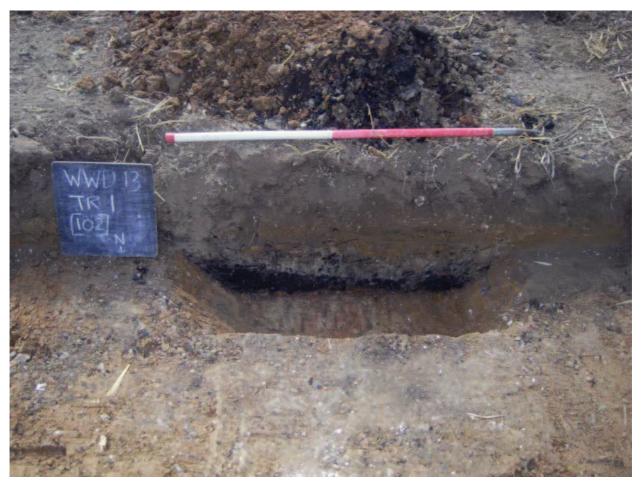


Plate 2: Pit 102 excavated in trench 1, looking south



Plate 3: Trench 2 as machined, looking north-east



Plate 4: Trench 3 as machined, looking south



Plate 5: Trench 4 as machined, looking east



Plate 6: Trench 5 as machined, looking north



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