

BRIMPTON (BR)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

Larkwhistle Farm South
Brimpton Common, Berkshire

1987

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Introduction

An archaeological assessment was carried out by the Oxford Archaeological Unit at Larkwhistle Farm South (LFS) in Spring 1987 on behalf of ARC. The aim was to assess the extent and condition of any archaeological remains that might exist in the area north of a Scheduled barrow group.

This information was required by Berkshire County Council in order to judge what, if any, archaeological restraints there might be on gravel extraction in the area.

Early Land Use

Rocques map of 1761 and the Ordinance Survey of 1817, 1877 show LFS to be part of Brimpton Common until 1877. It was subsequently cultivated at the turn of the century only to be abandoned again in the early 1920s. After a period of neglect it once more returned to arable land in 1950. It is at present under pasture and has been for the last 15 years.

A series of soil tests revealed a ph value of 7-6.5. Although neutral and adequate for the preservation of archaeological remains the fluctuating water table has had a serious effect on the survival of bone. The ploughsoil only survives to a maximum depth of 63.2cm., lying directly above a wide sheet of Lower Hill Terrace gravel. As a result of recent agricultural practices, ie land clearance, 'prairie busting', it has been considerably disturbed. Surface traces of furrows within broad ridges, proved to be associated with this period of land clearance.

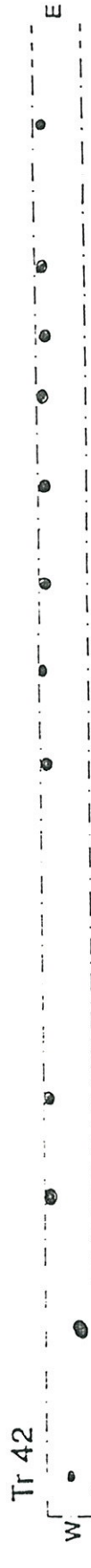
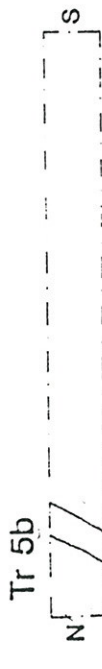
In section the ploughsoil consists of a dark brown, gravelly soil to silty loam with rounded and sub-angular gravel pebbles.




Archaeological Background

Originally there were 9 barrows that formed the Brimpton or Boughurst Barrow group. In the later part of the 19th century Greenwell and Homey 'exhaustively' examined barrows B6a and 6b (see plan) but with negative results. [1] In 1961 Mr R Sheridan found two handaxes within a disturbed context, 50 yards from barrow 6b. Their precise position in relation to the Barrow could not be determined.

1. N.D.F.C. Vol. IV, 1886-95, and Wymer J.J. "Lower Palaeolithic Archaeology in Britain".

PLAN 2



-  Features of Archaeological Interest
-  Other Features
-  Plough Mark



Methodology

A series of 30m. trenches was excavated according to a 60m. grid. Further trenches were excavated based on the evidence provided by the first group. The total percentage sample was increased from 2 to 2.3%. LFS was not suitable for field walking and aerial photography revealed no evidence of possible occupation or settlement patterns. Thus features could only be recognised by continuous monitoring of clearance. The topsoil was removed in three stages due to possible existence of shallow features ie burials or cremations. Spoil from the excavated trenches was carefully sorted and a percentage sample was taken for sieving. Features were initially half sectioned and then in some cases fully excavated for retrieval of dating evidence. Environmental samples were taken where possible.

The Archaeology

In brief, there were three defined areas of possible archaeological features (see Site Plan 1: A, B, C). Area A was located to the north-west of Barrow 6b. The former revealed a series of curved and linear ditches. They varied in dimensions from 0.40m. - 0.60m. in depth and 0.80m. - 1.25m. in width. When plotted these ditches enclose an area of approximately 70m. x 75m. In profile they all shared a dark brown silty loam fill, with particles of quartzite with reduced quantities of rounded and sub-angular gravel pebbles. An iron rich mineralized staining was observed at the interface between the ditch and the natural gravel layer. The upper levels of ditch F13 in Tr 28 contained rounded pieces of decomposed lightly-fired clay. Within Tr 24 a cavity or possibly a pit bottom, narrow and conical in form, was located outside the enclosed area defined by the ditches. It was crudely lined with clay and fired to little over 300 degrees C. Parallels for such pits were observed and excavated by Professor Richard Bradley at Aldermaston Wharf. [2] Like Brimpton this site was located on the first gravel terrace of the River Rennett floodplain. At Aldermaston such features were determined as storage pits and associated with late Bronze Age occupation. Despite conservation the Brimpton example was declared unsuitable for modern dating techniques. The interior contents were sieved and floated for environmental remains.

Area B consisted of a row of broad shallow postholes (Tr 42), running east-west and obliquely to the LFS field boundary. Each posthole had an average width of 0.35m - 0.40m. and 0.15m. in depth. A gap of 2.50m. separated one posthole from another. All contained a light brown clay fill but were devoid of pottery or other material culture. Two further postholes were exposed that followed a similar orientation but contained a fill of dark brown silt. A gravel packing was revealed at the base of the posthole.

2. Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society 1980, no. 46, pp. 217-295.

Area C was located to the north-east of Barrow 6b. Trench 37 revealed a second alignment of 12 smaller postholes with a light brown clay fill. They maintained an average width of 0.20m. and 0.10m. in depth. This trench also included a further posthole/pit with decomposed pieces of fired clay.

There was little evidence of significant areas of prehistoric or later occupation. The results of the assessment have been limited due to the poor state of preservation of archaeological remains and severe plough disturbance. 1) It is recommended that areas around A, B, and C be stripped prior to gravel extraction as part of a 'Watching Brief'. 2) That care be taken close to Barrow 6b so as to maintain current water levels within the ditches which may contain preserved organic remains.

Conclusion

Although the site produced a number of features - small clay lined pits and postholes - there was no dating evidence or material culture to indicate their age. Poor preservation of bone and severe disturbance by ploughing, combined with the sampling method to make the recovery of cremations unlikely.

Trenches 42 and 43, just north of the large Scheduled barrow, contain the most interesting features. If planning permission is granted for gravel extraction it would be desirable to strip the topsoil from this area carefully and excavate the features cut into the surface of the gravel. The rest of the area should be monitored during topsoil clearance.

In conclusion there seems to be no strong archaeological restraint on extraction at this site.

David Miles and John Lange
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June 1987

PLAN 1

LARKWHISTLE FARM : BRIMPTON 1987

