

Kings Meadow, Cirencester, Gloucestershire

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

**Oxford Archaeological Unit
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CIRENCESTER KINGS MEADOW WATCHING BRIEF

A watching brief was maintained by the Oxford Archaeological Unit on works in the vicinity of the Old Cricklade Road carried out in connection with the development of the Kings Meadow site by Britannia Construction for Tesco. Previous archaeological evaluation and excavation prior to the construction of the Tesco building had identified a number of archaeological features, mainly of Roman date, and also natural features and deposits which were in part contemporary with the Roman use of the site. All these features lay on the SW side of the road, which is thought to follow the line of Ermin Street, the major Roman road from Cirencester to Silchester. The watching brief was concerned principally with the collection of evidence which might help to relate the features to the Roman road itself. In the event this was unsuccessful. No further features were seen, nor was there any clear evidence for the Roman road.

The site was visited on a number of occasions between mid May and the end of July 1993. Ongoing contractors' excavations for services in and adjacent to the line of the Old Cricklade Road were monitored and recorded as necessary, but none of the excavations observed was of sufficient depth to provide useful evidence. The principal trenches observed were one for a water pipe along the SW margin of the road, and one for a gas pipe sited a little to the W of the centre of the road. The protracted process of excavation of these features meant that regular monitoring was impossible, and would certainly not have been cost-effective. The selection of ideal visitation times would have depended on more regular and informative communication from the site than was forthcoming. Despite this problem, however, the character of the lengths of trench observed was so consistent that it is thought very unlikely that any significant features were missed.

A section in the water pipe trench at the SW edge of the existing road at c CH230 m was recorded in detail. The trench at this point was 1.0 m deep below the current road surface. The section contained eight layers, all of which were very consistent in depth:

- 1) modern tarmac, depth 0.12 m.
- 2) brown sandy loam with some tarmac lumps and limestone chippings, depth 0.12 m.
- 3) grey-brown sandy loam (c 10YR 3/3), depth 0.02 m.
- 4) compact buff loamy sand (10YR 6/5), depth 0.08 m.
- 5) angular small limestone chunks, typically up to 0.05-0.06 m long, in matrix of buff-brown clay loam (c 10YR 5/4), depth 0.15 m.
- 6) brown loamy clay (10YR 5/4), depth 0.04 m.
- 7) gritty buff clay sand with occasional angular limestone fragments (2.5Y 7/4), depth 0.31m.
- 8) gritty dark buff loamy clay with occasional ?charcoal flecks and very occasional angular limestone fragments (2.5Y 5.5/4), depth 0.16 m (to bottom of trench).

There was no dating material of any kind from this or any of the other lengths of section examined. The character of the lower

layers (7 and 8) is very similar to deposits seen elsewhere in close proximity to Roman roads (eg at Asthall, OAU excavations 1992, where they were formed from material weathered off successive surfaces of Akeman Street). However there is no reason why such deposits should be exclusively of Roman date, and they could have derived from any limestone surface. It is also possible that such deposits could have served as makeup layers for a surface above (eg for layer 5 in this section), though in this particular case the presence of the intervening clay layer (6) argues against this idea.

The date of the lowest layers in this sequence is therefore unknown, and while it could be Roman it is perhaps more likely to be later. An identical sequence was observed elsewhere in the water pipe trench and in the subsequently excavated gas pipe trench (also cut to a depth of 1 m) situated some 3 m to the E. Lengths of this trench were observed between c CH125-135 and c CH220-275. The sections were so similar to that of the water pipe trench that no detailed recording was carried out. This remarkable consistency in the section argues for a relatively recent date for the sequence observed. An 18th or 19th century date might be possible for the lower deposits in both trenches. It is possible that deposits relating to the Roman road still survive at a greater depth than was reached in any of the observed trenches.

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