


Cable Burial, Hungerford Common AONB, Berkshire



**Archaeological
Watching Brief Report**

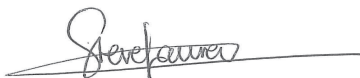
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Cable Burial, Hungerford Common AONB, Berkshire

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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Summary

In March 2015, Oxford Archaeology completed a watching brief during the burial of electric supply cables along the northern edge of Hungerford Common, east of Hungerford and south of the Kennet and Avon canal in Berkshire.

The majority of the watching brief observed deposits consistent with heathland soils forming part of Hungerford Common. A deeper soil profile observed at the western end of the scheme may suggest an agricultural/ploughsoil origin. This may be associated with the north-south aligned banks and terraces identified as part of the Berkshire National Mapping Programme within the northwest corner of Hungerford Common.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology South (OAS), was commissioned by SSE to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the replacement of existing overhead power lines with underground cables on Hungerford Common, Berkshire, within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The underground cables were installed using a mole plough which required the excavation of open pits for the jointing points for the cable lengths, the directional drilling pits at the railway bridge road crossing, and trenches to accommodate a new terminal pole and stays.
- 1.1.2 In September 2014 SSE contacted Alex Godden, Archaeological Officer for West Berkshire Council, at the outset of the planning for this scheme to identify potential cultural heritage assets that may be impacted upon during the works. This identified archaeological potential along the northern edge of Hungerford Common resulting in a request for appropriate archaeological recording to be undertaken as part of the scheme. Following additional discussion with regard to the installation method and areas of potential, SSE and the Archaeological Officer agreed that that a watching brief to record any remains encountered within the open cut trenches would be required.
- 1.1.3 OAS produced a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) detailing how it would implement the requirement for a watching brief during the open cut excavations within this scheme (OA, 2014).
- 1.1.4 The fieldwork was completed in two visits 2nd and 4th March 2015.

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The route runs across the northern edge of Hungerford Common between Down Gate Cottages at the eastern end and an industrial estate near Down Gate at the western end between SU 35591 67896 and SU 34329 68387 (Figs 1 & 2). The route lies on relatively flat and open ground of the common at approximately 105m above Ordnance Datum.
- 1.2.2 The underlying solid geology is recorded as Chalk of the Seaford Chalk Formation overlain at the eastern end by Sand and Gravel (Beenham Grange Gravel Member) (<http://www.bgs.ac.uk/discoveringGeology/geologyOfBritain/viewer.html>).



1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 As part of the preparation of the WSI, a short section identifying the specific background and potential relevant to the cable route was extracted from entries in the Berkshire Historic Environment Records database accessible via the Heritage Gateway website (<http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk>), and is reproduced here.
- 1.3.2 Port Down is a surviving common east of the town of Hungerford. The earliest known reference to it was in a survey of the Duchy of Lancaster in the year 35 Henry VIII (1513-14), when it was stated that Portdown contained 50 acres on which grew 50 oaks. Port Down was increased in size by a third when adjustments were made during the time of Parliamentary Enclosure by adding part of Sanham Down and Everlong (an arable field to the north). Its name means 'the gated down', and Down Gate, Inkpen Gate and Kintbury Gate are marked on Ordnance Survey maps at the west, south and east respectively (HER record MWB3380).
- 1.3.3 The Berkshire National Mapping Programme recorded at least six linear banks running roughly north to south, at right angles to the river Dun, in the northwest corner of Hungerford Common. Between the banks are substantial earthwork terraces, visible in various aerial photographs, and still present in the 21st century. The terraces appear to have been laid out in one phase and pre-date the railway line of 1847. Further analysis of the plots took place as part of the Hungerford Common Project in 2005, with several explanations suggested for their formation, one being the speculative laying out of burgage plots, or later post-medieval settlement.
- 1.3.4 However, there seems to be no other evidence of the expansion of the planned town to the east of the High Street, and it seems more likely that the terraces were made for some kind of agricultural activity; their slightly curved nature also implies plough action in their creation. The terraces did not originally lie within the boundaries of the common, and seem to have been on land which was added at the time of Parliamentary Enclosure (HER record MWB16817).



2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The aims of the watching brief were to:

- maintain archaeological monitoring throughout the period of invasive ground works at the specified locations,
- preserve by record any archaeological deposits encountered during the course of ground intrusions,
- seek to establish the extent, nature and date of any archaeological deposits encountered within the scope of the ground intrusion,
- secure the analysis, conservation and long-term storage of any artefactual/ecofactual material recovered from the site,
- disseminate results through the production of a grey literature report or, if warranted, through other publication means.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The watching brief observed all works that had the potential to disturb or destroy below ground archaeological remains between the terminal pole arrangement at the western end of the route and the railway road overbridge. These intrusive works comprised the excavation of a 25m length of cable trench at the western end of the scheme, a jointing pit for the joining of cable lengths midway approximately 500m east of the western terminal pole and the excavation of a directional drilling pit in order to cross below the road at the rail bridge (Fig. 2 Areas 1, 2 and 3 respectively).

2.2.2 These works were undertaken using a tracked mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket operated under archaeological supervision. Topsoil and subsoil were removed to the top of the underlying geology or any archaeological deposits, whichever were encountered first. Where no archaeological features were present, machine excavation continued to the full construction depth with minimal supervision following appropriate recording of the exposed soil sequence.

2.2.3 Provision was made that if archaeological features or deposits were encountered, machine excavation would cease in order to allow an appropriate investigation by hand excavation. These would be undertaken in order to fulfil the objective of retrieval of archaeological data affected by the works. Provision was also made for taking environmental/organic samples in accordance with OAS Environmental procedures.

2.2.4 All features and deposits were issued with unique context numbers, and context recording was in accordance with established OAS practices. Bulk finds were collected by context. Black-and-white negative photographs and a digital photographic record were taken of all trenches, general settings and archaeological features/sections.

2.2.5 Site plans were drawn at an appropriate scale (normally 1:20 or 1:50) with other scale plans of features as necessary. Trench location plans were drawn at a scale of 1:100 or greater or recorded digitally using GPS equipment. Section drawings of features and sample sections of trenches were drawn at a scale of 1:20.



3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

3.1.1 A total of three excavations areas were observed as part of the watching brief relating to each specific installation impact as noted above. General descriptions are given in the following section with dimension details provided in Appendix A.

Area 1, Excavations adjacent to the western terminal post

3.1.2 Area 1 comprised the excavation of approximately 25m length of open trenching measuring 0.8m wide and an average of 0.32m in depth (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3, Section 1). This trench was excavated to accommodate the new terminal pole and stay.

3.1.3 The underlying subsoil, a mid orange-brown silty clay (2), was exposed in the base of the trench throughout its length. This was overlain by a layer of dark grey-brown clayey silt (1), the present day topsoil. This deposit produced a single sherd of glazed earthenware.

Area 2, Excavations 500m east of the western terminal post

3.1.4 Area 2 was excavated to join the cable lengths. The jointing pit measured 8m in length with a maximum width of 3m, dug to a depth of 1m below ground level (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3, Section 2).

3.1.5 The underlying natural, composed of flint gravels and weathered chalk within a mid orange-brown clay matrix (6), was encountered at a depth of 0.2m below the current ground level. Overlying this was a layer of dark grey-brown clayey silt (5), the present day topsoil. No finds were recovered from this area.

Area 3, Excavations adjacent to the rail overbridge, Dun Mill Lock

3.1.6 Area 3 was a launch pit excavated to enable directional drilling under the approach roads to the rail bridge near Dun Mill Lock. The excavated pit measured 9.7m by 1.6m and 1.05m deep below the current ground level (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3, Section 3).

3.1.7 A layer of naturally occurring coarse flint gravels within a mid brownish yellow sand matrix (4) was recorded at a depth of 0.22m below the current ground level overlain by the present day topsoil (3). No finds were recovered from this deposit.

3.2 Finds

3.2.1 A single fragment of brown glazed earthenware, part of a bowl rim, was recovered from the topsoil (1) within Area 1. This is dated 18th-19th century. No other finds were recovered during the course of the watching brief.

3.3 Environmental remains

3.3.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were observed during the length of the watching brief.



4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The subsoil, 2, observed within the open trenching in Area 1, probably represents the weathered top of the underlying natural deposits, while Layers 4 and 6 within Areas 2 and 3 respectively were recorded as variations with the local natural deposits.
- 4.1.2 Layers 1, 3 and 5 all represent topsoil deposits. The limited depth and the scarcity of artefacts within layers 3 and 5 in Areas 2 and 3 suggest that these deposits were not the result of ploughing or cultivation, but formed as part of the continuous grazing of the heath or downland comprising the northern edge of Hungerford Common.
- 4.1.3 The topsoil horizon (1) within Area 1 was considerably deeper than the comparative deposits observed elsewhere. This may have resulted from agricultural activities such as repeated ploughing and soil improvements. This area also coincides with the north-south aligned banks and terrace earthworks recorded by the Berkshire National Mapping Programme. The interpretation of this topsoil as having an agricultural origin may tentatively support the identification of the earthworks as originating from agricultural activity. The recovery of the single fragment of pottery of 18th- to 19th-century date is consistent with these being formed post enclosure act and before the coming of the railway.



APPENDIX A. ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Depth	Comments	Finds	Date
1	Layer	0.32m	Present day topsoil, possible ploughsoil deposit	Pottery	C18th - C19th
2	Layer	> 0.1m	Weathered top of the underlying natural	-	-
3	Layer	0.22m	Present day topsoil	-	-
4	Layer	> 0.8m	Natural	-	-
5	Layer	0.22m	Present day topsoil	-	-
6	Layer	> 0.8m	Natural	-	-



APPENDIX B. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name:	Cable Burial, Hungerford Common AONB, Berkshire
Site code:	HUGCAB 14
Grid reference:	SU 34329 68387 to SU SU 35591 67896
Type of watching brief:	Observations on three areas of open trench, part of the replacement of overhead power cables with underground cables east of Hungerford.
Date and duration of project:	2nd and 4th March 2015
Area of site:	Three areas combined approximately 60m ²

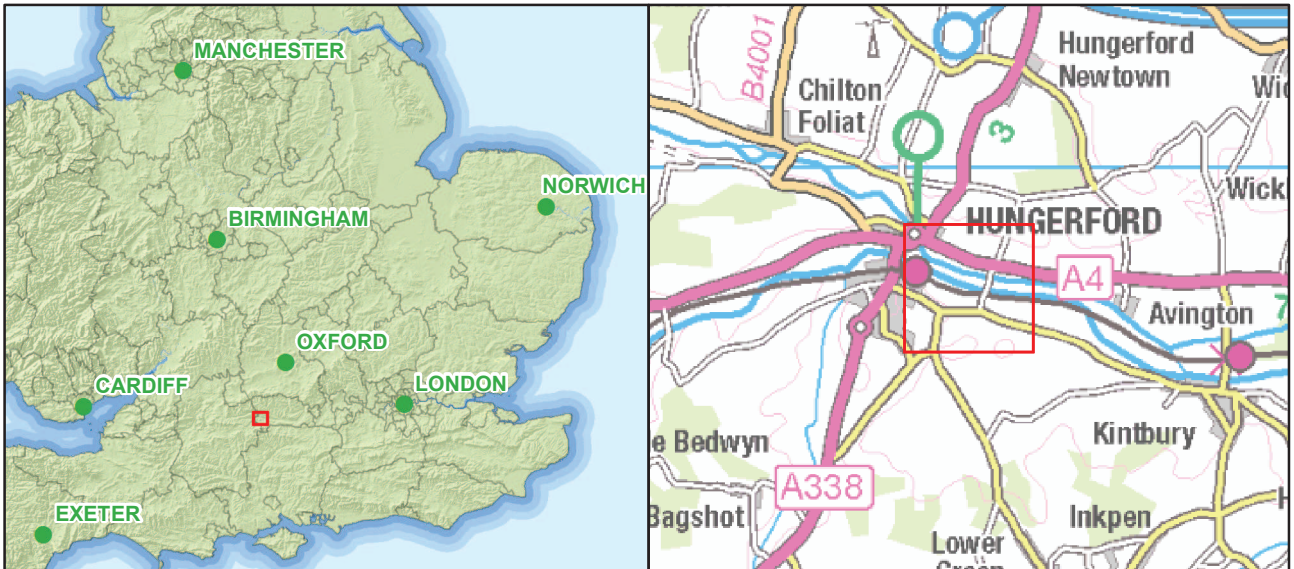
Summary of results:

In March 2015, Oxford Archaeology completed a watching brief during the burial of electric supply cables along the northern edge of Hungerford Common, east of Hungerford and south of the Kennet and Avon canal in Berkshire.

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Location of archive:

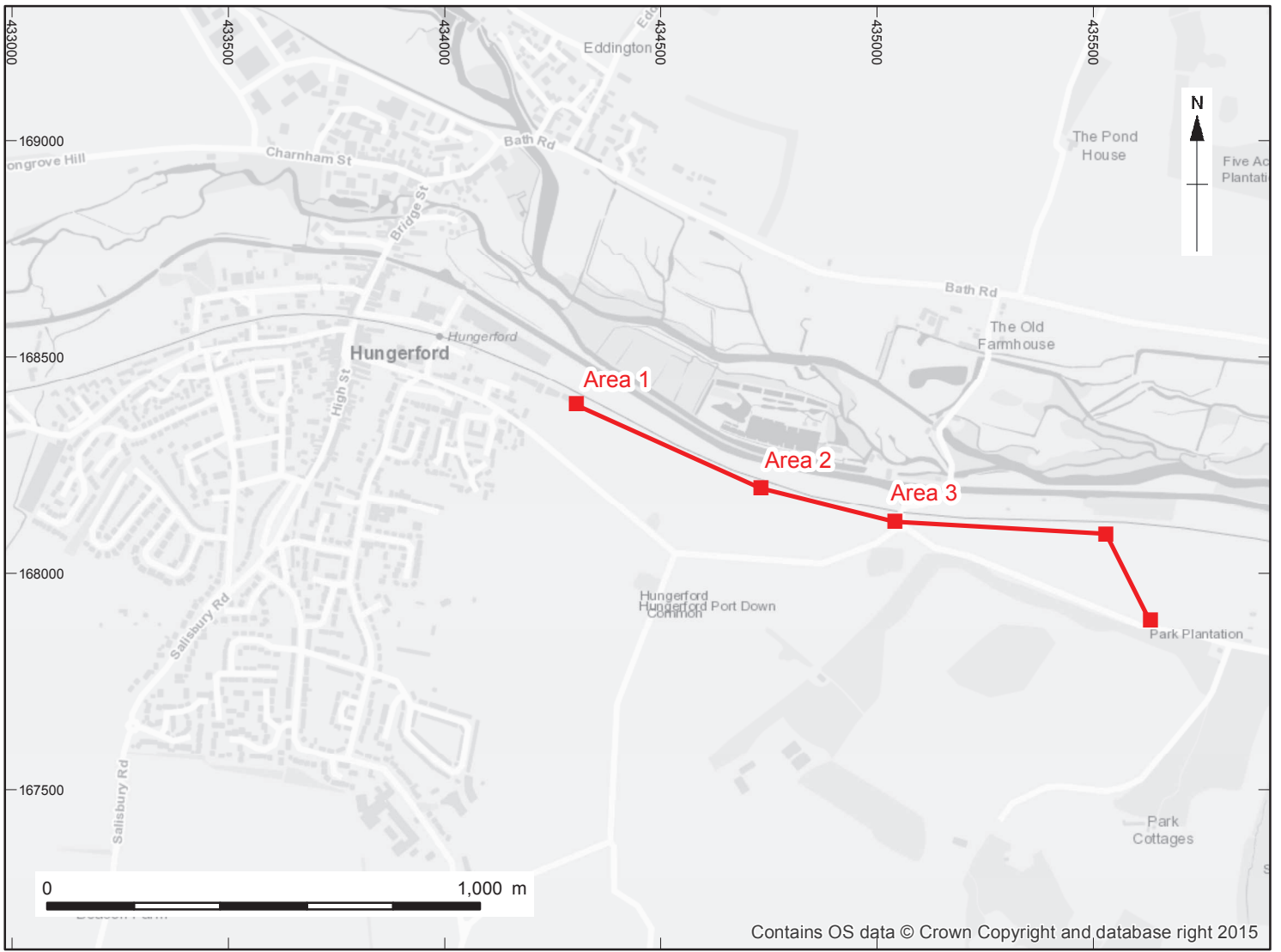
The archive is currently held at Oxford Archaeology's head office at Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES. This will be deposited with West Berkshire Heritage Service in due course under the accession number NEBYM:2014.46.



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Figure 1: Site location



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Figure 2: Site plan showing location of excavations

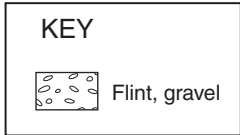
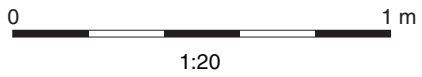
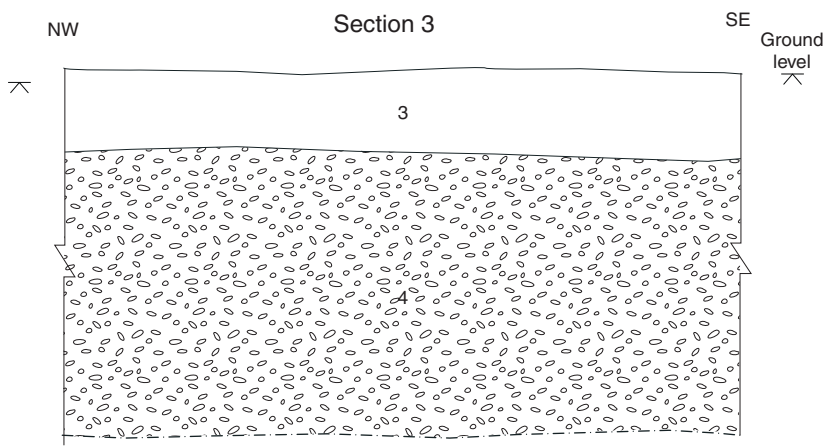
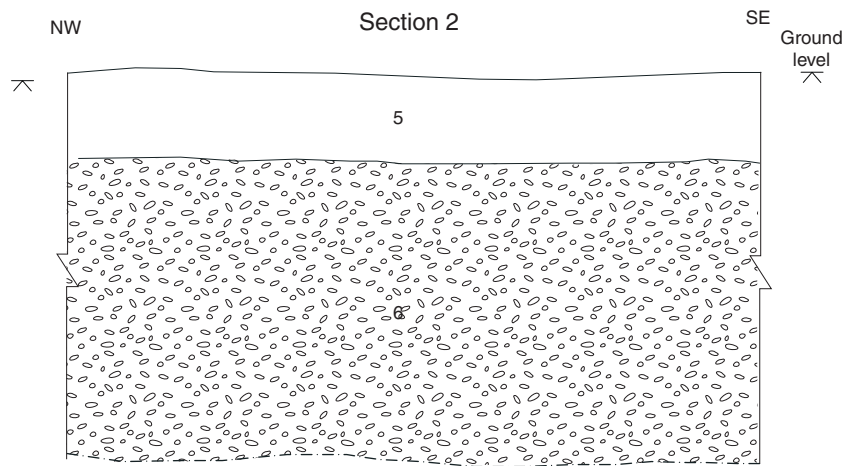
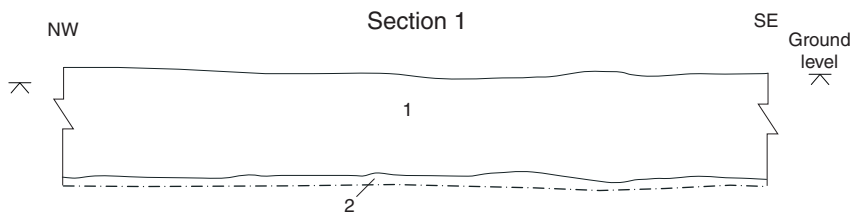


Figure 3: Sections



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