



Gatwick Airport New NWZ Hangar

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

March 2020

Client: Gatwick Airport Ltd

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Gatwick Airport New NWZ Hangar
Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Written by Steve Teague

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Summary

Between the 17th of November and the 5th of December 2017, Oxford Archaeology undertook a watching brief during groundwork for the construction of a new aircraft hangar at Gatwick Airport. An area of c 0.6ha was stripped revealing no archaeological features or finds.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Gatwick Airport Ltd for commissioning this project. Thanks are also extended to Alex Eggington, Archaeological Officer at Surrey County Council, who monitored the work on behalf of Gatwick Airport Ltd.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Richard Brown. The fieldwork was undertaken by Christof Heistermann. Thanks are also extended to OA staff who prepared the archive under the management of Nicky Scott.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Gatwick Airport Ltd and Boeing Commercial Aviation Services Europe Ltd to undertake a watching brief at the site of a proposed new aircraft hangar.
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition of planning permission (planning ref. CR/2017/0116/CC2). Although the local planning authority has not set a brief for the work, discussions with Alex Eggington, Archaeological Officer at Surrey County Council (SCC), had established the scope of work required. A written scheme of investigation was produced by OA detailing the local authority's requirements for work necessary to discharge the planning condition (OA 2017a). This document also included the proposed methodology for palaeoenvironmental sampling that was to be undertaken concurrently with the watching brief. Subsequently OA produced a desk-based assessment of data from 51 geotechnical boreholes and test pits that had been undertaken as part of the development. Together with data from previous evaluation trenches the report concluded that the palaeoenvironmental sampling was not necessary (OA 2018).

1.2 Location, topography and geology

- 1.2.1 The site is located on the northern edge of the Weald within a broad river valley created by the River Mole and several small tributaries flowing northwards towards the Thames. The site is bounded to the north, south and east by existing parts of Gatwick Airport and to the west by Brockley Wood.
- 1.2.2 The southern part of the site has previously been used for storage materials and spoil from previous airfield projects. The eastern part of the site contains a strip of managed airfield grassland and the route of Larkins Road (which serves an airport construction logistics area and the airport's concrete batching plant). The northern and western parts of the site are undeveloped and comprise areas of grassland and the remnants of former woodland and hedgerows which have been eroded by previous development in this part of the airport. A remnant channel of the Man's Brook traverses the northern part of the site.
- 1.2.3 The geology of the area is mapped as Cretaceous Weald Clay, overlain by wide expanses of alluvium, deposited by the River Mole lapping against the remnants of two gravel terraces (first and second Mole Terrace; FA 2001).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background of the site has been described in detail in a desk-based assessment carried out by Framework Archaeology in February 2001 (FA 2001) and summarized in a Heritage Statement prepared by OA in 2017 (OA 2017b) and will not be reproduced here.

- 1.3.2 The Heritage Statement concluded that the site has a low potential to contain significant archaeological remains, based on the result of an evaluation that was carried out by Framework Archaeology in February 2001.
- 1.3.3 The results of the evaluation suggest that the site was part of the River Mole floodplain. Archaeological features dating to the Bronze Age and Anglo-Saxon periods and a small amount Mesolithic flintwork were recorded on the higher ground to the north, but no features of this kind were identified within the site. Deep alluvial deposits (up to 2.4m thick overlying gravel) were recorded in the northern part of the site; these are indicative of fluvial or lacustrine activity suggesting that the site may have been too wet for human inhabitation. No peat or organic deposits were noted in the evaluation report and the alluvium was typically described as massive minerogenic clay. Trenches were excavated until the gravel or bedrock was exposed. In the areas where the alluvium was deep, this was carried out through sondages cut into the base of the trench.
- 1.3.4 The evaluation indicated that there were good conditions for the preservation of archaeological deposits within the site and the lack of archaeological features was therefore considered to reflect a true absence of human activity rather than the removal of archaeological features and deposits by later ground disturbance.
- 1.3.5 The archaeological features recorded within the site related to the agricultural use of the landscape in the post-medieval period.

2 WATCHING BRIEF AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The project aims and objectives were as follows:

- i. To determine or confirm the general nature of any remains present.
- ii. To determine or confirm the approximate date or date range of any remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The watching brief comprised monitoring groundwork that had the potential to expose or disturb any archaeological deposits during the development groundwork by means of coordinated visits. This work was undertaken intermittently between the 17th of November and the 5th of December 2017.

2.2.2 An area measuring up to c 0.60ha, corresponding to that shown on Figure 1, was mechanical stripped of topsoil and subsoil by the groundwork contractor.

2.2.3 The cleaning out of the extant Man's Brook that crosses the southern part of the site was also monitored.

2.2.4 Subsequent groundwork for a new road that circumnavigated the northern, western and southern edges of the site were not monitored after agreement with Joanna Taylor (SCC).

3 RESULTS

- 3.1.1 The depth of stripping that was achieved varied across the site according to the landscaping requirements of the development. It generally achieved a depth of no more than c 0.30m and did not consistently reach the natural brickearth. North of Man's Brook, the base of the subsoil was largely not penetrated.
- 3.1.2 The methodology employed by the groundwork contractor, especially the use of wheeled vehicles that tracked over freshly stripped areas, reduced the visibility of the surface of the natural. Nonetheless, an estimated 25% of the site, where the natural was sufficiently visible to further confirm the negative results of the earlier evaluation.
- 3.1.3 Monitoring of the cleaning out of Man's Brook, that occurred after the general strip of the site, allowed for a visual inspection of its sides. At a point near to the north-east corner of the site, probable Wealden Clay was exposed at a depth of c 1.8m and was overlain by deposits of greyish silty clay alluvium.
- 3.1.4 No finds were recovered from the watching brief.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

4.1.1 Notwithstanding the limited area of natural that was exposed and the site working conditions, it was possible to examine a sufficient area of site.

4.2 Watching brief objectives and results

4.2.1 The watching brief has confirmed the absence of archaeological features on the site.

4.3 Interpretation

4.3.1 The watching brief has confirmed the results of the evaluation (OA 2001) that concluded that there was an absence of human activity on the site. Examination of the sides of the cleaned-out Man's Brook recorded similar sterile floodplain alluvium to that revealed within the evaluation sondages and within the geotechnical boreholes and test pits.

4.4 Significance

4.4.1 It is likely that the low-lying former floodplain of which the site formed a part was unsuitable for human activity.

APPENDIX A BIBLIOGRAPHY

FA, 2001 Gatwick Airport: North West Zone Development Phase 1: archaeological evaluation report, Framework Archaeology unpublished report

OA, 2017a Gatwick Airport New NWZ Hangar: written scheme of investigation for a watching brief and palaeoenvironmental sampling

OA, 2017b Gatwick Airport new NWZ hangar: archaeological impact assessment, unpublished document by Oxford Archaeology, Oxford

OA, 2018 Gatwick Airport New NWZ Hangar: Geoarchaeological Desk-based Assessment, unpublished Oxford Archaeology unpublished report

APPENDIX B**SITE SUMMARY DETAILS / OASIS REPORT FORM**

Site name:	Gatwick Airport New NWZ Hangar
Site code:	CRGAT17
Grid Reference	NGR TQ 2600 4085
Type:	Watching brief
Date and duration:	17th November to 5th December 2017 (intermittently)
Area of Site	0.60ha
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, and will be deposited with Crawley Museum in due course, under the following accession number: n/a.
Summary of Results:	Between 17th November and 5th December 2017, Oxford Archaeology undertook a watching brief during groundwork for the construction of a new aircraft hangar at Gatwick Airport. An area of c 0.6ha was stripped revealing no archaeological features or finds.



Figure 1: Site location



Plate 1: North of Man's Brook, stripped, view W



Plate 2: Eastern area of site, stripped, view SE



Plate 3: Man's Brook, cleaned out, view NW



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