

WOODSTOCK BYPASS

Stage 1 report



Oxford Archaeological Unit



Woodstock Bypass
Stage 1 report
Archaeological Assessment

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 An archaeological evaluation was undertaken along the corridor of land required for the A44 Woodstock bypass proposal. This report forms Stage 1 of the evaluation; a desktop assessment combined with a surface collection survey and geophysical survey.
- 1.2 The study has been undertaken by The Oxford Archaeological Unit (geophysical study was carried out by A Bartlett) on behalf of the County Engineer's Department.
- 1.3 Geophysical and fieldwalking plots are attached as appendices.

2.0 Desktop assessment

- 2.1 As the current proposal for the bypass is the culmination of a series of schemes the County Archaeological Officer is content that only the most recent aerial photographs are consulted (see below) and that no further work be done on the documentary evidence and aerial photographs at this point as this would be duplication of existing material.
- 2.2 The Victoria County History and the First Edition O.S. 1" map were consulted. The County Sites and Monuments record and the collection of Aerial photographs were used. The list of accessions to the Ashmolean museum was consulted back to 1870.
- 2.3 The RCHM library of aerial photographs at Swindon was consulted for relevant material. There were no post 1985 photographs showing cropmarks on the line of the proposed route.

3.0 Fieldwalking

3.1 Methodology

- 3.1.1 The surface collection survey followed the basic premise that all arable areas of landtake should be subjected to sampling using a systematic linear transect method to a standard specification.
- 3.1.2 The survey was based on a corridor approximately 30 m wide, ie 15 m either side of the centre line of the road, with provision being made for areas of extra landtake required for landscaping or junctions (50 m corridor). Artefacts were collected in 20 m units along transects set 10 m apart. The centre line of the road was set out by the County Engineer's Department.
- 3.1.3 Points were set out at 10 m intervals using the following method. Sighting poles were set up at the opposite end of a particular land parcel (or at the limits of vision) and the transects were walked, each 20 m unit being measured cumulatively to avoid the variation in individual pace
- 3.1.4 Transects actually walked were recorded on field record forms by indicating the presence or absence of finds.
- 3.1.5 A field log book and a series of field record sheets were kept to record variations within and between each land parcel.
- 3.1.6 Guidelines were devised in advance of fieldwork on which artefacts were to be collected and these were adhered to.
- 3.1.7 A collection strategy was devised in order to avoid the problem of bias in the finds assemblage caused by selective recovery of different categories of objects. For most object categories the aim was total recovery, irrespective of the date of the material in question. It was hoped that this would prevent the discard of finds in the field which might result in an imbalance in the recorded quantities of material such as tile and pottery.

The only items not recorded were 20th-century plastics, bakelite, asbestos and large metal objects derived from modern agricultural machinery and golf balls.

- 3.1.8 All finds were processed at the OAU and the preliminary identifications and quantification (Dr Jane Timby (external specialist) - Roman pottery, Pippa Bradley (OAU) - flintwork, Cathy Underwood-Keevill (external specialist) - medieval and post-medieval pottery and other finds) was entered directly onto the computer at the OAU (IBM compatible PC using dBase IV+).
- 3.1.9 All the finds were recorded on a computerised database (using dBase IV+)

in quite broad object categories. The finds were dated where possible. The computerised data was used to provide lists of artefact types by period and formed the basis for a series of finds distribution plots for each of the land parcels surveyed during the project. For the plots see the appendix.

3.2 *General results*

3.2.1 The principal finds categories were pottery, brick, tile, shell, metal working slag, fire cracked flint, burnt limestone and worked flint. Analysis concentrated on those groups, particularly pottery and worked flint, which were likely to provide chronological information. Burnt flint and limestone were plotted as they often indicate early prehistoric and late prehistoric and early Romano-British domestic sites respectively.

3.2.2 Finds common along the proposed route were post-medieval pottery, metal working slag and shell (Figs 8, 9, 10, 16, 17, 18, 25, 26, 27, 32, 33 and 34). From their distribution the pottery and slag and probably most of the shell are from modern manuring. This may also be true for some of the burnt limestone (Figs 7, 15, 24 and 31). Although some concentrations of burnt limestone may relate to archaeological sites. It is unlikely that heat generated from stubble burning was sufficient to burn either the limestone or flint (Figs 13, 21 and 29) *in situ*. The small size of many of the sherds of modern pottery (and glass) would indicate that the material had been present in ploughsoil for some time and considerably abraded by ploughing. The shells are also probably recent as it is not common to find quantities of shells so far from the sea and rivers without the involvement of modern modes of transport.

The total number of finds was: 40 struck flints, 9 burnt flints, 154 sherds of Roman pottery and around 100 medieval sherds.

3.2.3 There are no absolute criteria which separate a definite concentration of material, implying a site, from random scatters. The distribution of finds have been plotted according to their standard deviation from the mean for each individual find type. A significant scatter is taken to be one that shows considerable variation from the norm for the survey area. This is interpreted as a cluster of adjacent collection unit each with more than two standard deviations from the mean for that find type. (NB an error in entering the flintwork on computer for plotting resulted in a range of deviation from 1 to 90. Flints were only found in ones and twos.)

3.2.4 The results involve an element of subjectivity dependent on the type of material in question. For example, worked flint survives relatively well in ploughsoils even though it can become heavily abraded. Prehistoric pottery is less well fired than Roman and medieval pottery and is correspondingly fragile and therefore is unlikely to survive ploughing as well.

3.2.5 Surface visibility was generally good with at least 85-95% of the soil surface

visible.

- 3.2.6 Most of the route lies over limestone. The valley of the River Glyme has alluvial deposits 4 m deep while the W side of the valley has a hill of silty clay.

4.0 Geophysical Survey

- 4.1 The geophysical survey was carried out on those parts of the route unavailable for surface collection survey. The geophysical survey was carried out over a corridor 20 m wide along the centre line of the route. For further details of the methodology and results see the report attached as an appendix.

5.0 Detailed synthesis of results

- 5.0.1 For the purposes of this overview the route has been divided into four sections: section one from the Old Woodstock roundabout to the River Glyme, section 2 from the River Glyme to Sansom's Lane, section three from Sansom's Lane to Shipton Road and section four from Shipton Road to the Bladon Roundabout (see plan in fieldwalking appendix).

- 5.0.2 Generally the entries for each section are in chronological order

- 5.1 *Section 1 from the Old Woodstock Roundabout to the river Glyme (Fig. 1).*

The geology of this section was limestone with deep deposits of alluvium in the river valley.

- 5.1.1 A manuscript entry on the SMR indicates that a length of the North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch or a Romano-British or later track aligned towards Combe from Stratford Bridge (SW) may be present at the proposed site of the Old Woodstock Roundabout. (PRN 8910, SP 4380 1824)

- 5.1.2 Seven flint flakes were found by field walking on the proposed route of the road over 200 m (centred SP 4300 1815, Chainage point (CP) 110). Two of the flakes were burnt. (Fig. 2)

- 5.1.3 A scatter of 148 sherds of Roman pottery was found on the proposed route of the road (centred on SP 4344 1808, CP 540 see fig. 4). The condition of the potsherds was in most cases poor as would be expected with material subjected to prolonged exposure in ploughsoil. However, in some cases the material was in relatively fair condition suggesting slightly more recent disturbance of underlying archaeological features. The majority of the pottery appears to be of later Roman date including several products of the Oxfordshire industries. Other wares present include examples of Dorset Black-burnished ware (BB1), Severn Valley ware Samian, Midlands pink

grogged storage jar ware and wares from the Savernake region, Wiltshire. Of particular note are 13 sherds potentially dating to the first half of the 1st century. This appeared to be the only collection of sherds containing specifically earlier material. The sherd size of the Roman pottery observed during collection was noticeably larger than the post-medieval pottery and even though the Roman pottery has been abraded by ploughing it may have suffered less ploughing than the modern pottery because it has been more recently introduced into the ploughsoil from archaeological features than the modern pottery.

- 5.1.4 A scatter of Romano-British tile and brick 300 m in extent on the proposed route of the road (centred on SP 4344 1808, CP 540 see Fig. 3) accompanied the Roman pottery. The collection of tile included fragments of roof tiles which may indicate ?2nd-century structures.
- 5.1.5 A small scatter of burnt stone on the proposed route of the road (centred on SP 4330 1814, CP 460 see Fig. 7) was located just uphill from the Roman pottery and tile. This may be derived from the settlement indicated by the Roman pottery.
- 5.1.6 Three sherds of late Saxon pottery were found on the proposed route of the road (at SP 4348 1807, CP 520 see Fig. 5). Two sherds were of fabric OXB and the other was not identifiable as to fabric.
- 5.1.7 A scatter 36 sherds of medieval pottery on the proposed route of the road (centred at SP 4344 1808, CP 540 see Fig. 6) was also located. As this is slightly denser than the distribution of medieval pottery on the rest of the route (eg Fig. 14) it may indicate medieval activity.
- 5.1.8 The Oxfordshire County Council SMR library of aerial photographs show a faint double line on the line of the proposed route running into a dark area at the bottom of the slope which may be geological (at SP 4344 1807). Within and to the S of the dark area is a much lighter N-S line. These cropmarks are indistinct and may not indicate archaeological features. Photographs consulted: 3691 line 16, 063, 064 and 3591 line 17, 229. Both sets of photographs were taken on the 28/06/91.
- 5.1.9 The fields immediately to the W of the River Glyme were unavailable for surface survey. Geophysical survey was used and found only two pit type anomalies (see attached appendix).

5.2 *Section 2 From the River Glyme to Sansom's Lane (Fig. 11).*

The geology of this section was silty clay and mudstone over limestone.

- 5.2.1 Green Lane to the E of the River Glyme and W of the Sewerage works, Bridleway No. 3, is an ancient track (PRN 1875).
- 5.2.2 There were seven flint flakes on the proposed route of the road (see Fig. 12),

one of which was burnt, and three other pieces of burnt flint (Fig. 13). These finds were not clustered and so are not likely to represent a site. They do indicate prehistoric activity in the area of the Glyme.

5.2.3 To the N of the proposed route is Hensington enclosure (PRN 1302 and Scheduled Ancient Monument Oxfordshire 74 centred around SP 4535 1779 see Fig. 11). A large 100 m x100 m enclosure with an E facing entrance. The enclosure appears to overlie an earlier field system which may extend S across the line of the proposed Bypass. Romano-British pottery has been recovered from the area and probably derives from the enclosure and its surrounding field system.

5.2.4 A scatter of burnt limestone on the proposed route of the road (Fig. 15) may derive from domestic debris from the nearby enclosure but there was no Roman pottery associated with the stone.

5.2.5 There were 38 medieval sherds in this section on the proposed route of the road. They were not clustered and so probably represent a manuring scatter (Fig. 14).

5.3 *Section 3, from Sansom's Lane to Shipton Road (Fig. 19).*

The geology of this section was limestone with made up ground in the area of the old railway line.

5.3.1 There were 8 flint flakes and one possible microlith scattered on the proposed route of the road over 200 m (centred at SP 4573 1742, CP 2060 see Fig. 20). These flints were not particularly clustered but may indicate prehistoric activity in the bottom of a slight valley.

5.3.2 Five flakes, one core, one microlith and one irregular lump were scattered on the proposed route of the road over 200 m (centred at SP 4481 1701, CP 2620 see Figs 20 and 28). This is not a dense cluster indicating a site but may indicate a further area of prehistoric activity on the slope looking towards Bladon. The core had two platforms and showed some traces of blade removals.

5.3.3 On the proposed route of the road to the S were three flakes (SP 4481 1676, CP 2740 see Fig. 28) and a side scraper which had been plough damaged (SP 4484 1660, CP 2960 see Fig. 28). These flints may have been moved down the slope by ploughing.

5.3.4 There were three pieces of burnt flint on the proposed route of the road which were not clustered (see Figs 21 and 29). One of the pieces came from the same collection unit as a flake.

5.3.5 Six sherds of Roman pottery were centred at SP 4472 1746 on the proposed route of the road (CP 2020 see Fig. 22). They coincided with a scatter of burnt stone (Figs 24 and 31) which was slightly denser than elsewhere in

section 3. This may be evidence of nearby Roman settlement activity.

5.3.6 An old road which may be Saxon or earlier (PRN 13022) is aligned N-S from Akeman Street. It forms the field boundary W of Blenheim Villa and runs N across the proposed line of the road. It is first mentioned in a 1005 charter relating to Shipton-on-Cherwell.

5.3.7 Medieval pottery was present throughout the section on the proposed route of the road. It was not clustered and so may not represent a site but perhaps a manuring scatter from nearby Hensington (Figs 23 and 30).

5.4 *Section 4, from Shipton Lane to the Bladon Roundabout*

The geology of this section is limestone. The fields had not been ploughed and were not available for surface collection survey. A geophysical survey was carried out over the proposed route.

5.4.1 A flint scatter was found in 1973 at SP 4552 1618 (PRN 5860).

5.4.2 The road mentioned above (5.36) is to the W of the section.

5.4.3 A corridor Roman villa (PRN 9413) 160 m to the W of the proposed route of the road with an apsidal end was located by aerial photography in 1971 and evaluated by the OAU in 1985. The villa was found to be well preserved and wall plaster was observed lying next to the walls. The villa is indicated in the field by a noticeable rise.

5.4.4 Non systematic fieldwalking was carried out in previous and subsequent years to determine plough damage to the site (D Miles pers comm). The principal find from these was a pillar.

5.4.5 A pipeline was laid immediately to the N of the villa in 1981 and was subject to a watching brief by the OAU. No archaeological deposits or artefacts were noted.(PRN 9413)

5.4.6 Cropmarks of field boundaries associated with the villa extend to the E across the line of the road. One of these boundaries (at chainage point 3600) was investigated by trenching by the OAU in 1992 and found to be 0.05 m deep and 0.20 m wide. Further trenches to the N revealed no features and no artefacts from the monitored spoil.

5.4.7 A single sherd of Roman pottery was found at SP 4560 1644 (PRN 12928). This is indicative of Roman activity in the area (see 5.3.5).

5.4.8 Geophysical survey located three anomalies which may be ditches associated with the Blenheim Villa. These ditches are all on the same alignment.

5.4.9 At the N of section 1, to the N of and apparently bounded by one of the

ditches, is an area of magnetic disturbance perhaps of an archaeological nature. (see geophysical appendix)

6.0 Conclusions

- 6.1 The preferred route of the Woodstock By Pass crosses an area of general archaeological interest evidenced by pre-existing records, air photography and the result of the non-intrusive survey reported here.
- 6.2 The specific features sites, or focii of activity listed below have been identified. The full importance and potential of these areas cannot be determined without further detailed evaluation, but a preliminary comment is made on their likely character and value.

Chainage 10-210 Diffuse scatter of prehistoric worked flints.

Uncertain significance

Chainage centred 460 Diffuse scatter of burnt stone.

Possibly associated with Roman and prehistoric settlement in area, not definitely a discreet settlement and of low to uncertain significance.

Chainage 440-640 Dense scatter of Roman pottery, tile and brick.

Almost certainly a substantial farming settlement of at least county to regional importance.

Chainage 390-690 Diffuse scatter of late Saxon and Medieval pottery.

Probably low significance. No obvious documentary evidence for a settlement, so this may be no more than a relatively dense scatter of material from manuring, but could be more significant.

Chainage 980-1020 Three possible pits from geophysical survey.

Might be natural, and of probably low significance even if archaeological, but could indicate area of prehistoric or other low density settlement.

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| Chainage 1960-2160 | Diffuse scatter of prehistoric worked flint |
| | Uncertain significance |
| Chainage 1990-2040 | Cluster of six sherds of Roman pottery and burnt stone |
| | Possibly a small settlement or part of a larger one, at least nearby. Uncertain significance, especially if part of a more extensive site. |
| Chainage 2520-2720 | Diffuse scatter of prehistoric worked flint. |
| | Uncertain significance. |
| Chainage 3030-3220 | Area of high magnetic susceptibility bounded by ditch to S. |
| | Uncertain significance since only one definite possible feature and some amorphous anomalies were identified from the geophysical survey. |
| Chainage 3220-3440 | Area with two possible pits bounded by ditch to S. |
| | Probably low significance. |
| Chainage 3670-3850 | Area of pit and ditches indicated by geophysical survey and limited trial trenching. |
| | Probably of relatively low significance as outlying paddocks and fields of Blenheim Villa. |

6.3 The most important site is likely to be the newly discovered Roman site towards the northern end of the route. This would be directly affected by the route where it is mainly on embankment as it crosses a dry valley west of the River Glyme. The main concentration of finds covers a length of c. 200m of the route where it varies in width from 25 to 65m. Topsoil stripping of this area would be likely to cause substantial damage to underlying archaeological deposits. The site would certainly need relatively extensive excavation if it were to be adequately recorded in advance of

construction. This could require significant time and funding. Exactly how much of either is uncertain, but in the order of 3 to 6 months fieldwork and a high five or low six figure sum (allowing for analysis and publication as well as fieldwork) could well be involved. It is important to note that these figures give only a very broad range to the possible scale of the work that might be needed. The scale of this work could only be clarified through further evaluation by trenching, to establish in detail the state of preservation, character, date range and potential of the site.

It might prove technically feasible to bury the site undisturbed beneath the embankment by leaving the topsoil in situ and covering it with appropriate geofabrics and ballast to support the embankment. However this option would render the site inaccessible to any future research for the foreseeable future, which might not be appropriate if the site is of some significance, nor has the engineering feasibility been examined. There could also be residual impacts from the construction of roadside ditches or drains. It would still be necessary to define the character and extent of the site more firmly before choosing this option.

If the preferred route were to be altered to avoid this site, any alternative alignment would require an archaeological survey to a similar standard to ensure that no other significant unknown sites would be affected.

The other areas of potential along the route would also be likely to require further evaluation to establish their precise character, but it is likely that this might provide an adequate record in most cases, or where not, that the scale of detailed investigation would be much smaller than for the major Roman site.

Decisions on the detailed approach to be adopted in these cases would need to be made on the basis of the professional judgement of the County Archaeologist and English Heritage Inspector.

Oxford Archaeological Unit
46 Hythe Bridge Street
Oxford OX1 2EP



Tel: 0865 243888 Fax: 0865 793496

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