

Land drainage works Avebury Wiltshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



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Avebury, Wiltshire Land Drainage Works

NGR: SU03700

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

In June 2006, Oxford Archaeology carried out an archaeological watching brief at the Thames Water Pumping Station, Avebury, Wiltshire (NGR SU03700). The work was commissioned by Kennet District Council in advance of re-excavation of part of an existing drainage ditch and the opening of a new section of ditch. The watching brief revealed the fill of a recent drainage ditch with modern finds, a modern topsoil and the presence of an undated ploughsoil or former topsoil. No features were observed and natural chalk was not observed along the length of the new excavation.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 In June 2006, Oxford Archaeology carried out an archaeological watching brief at the Thames Water Pumping Station, Avebury, Wiltshire (NGR SU03700). The work was commissioned by Kennet District Council in advance of re-excavation of part of an existing drainage ditch and the opening up of a new section of drainage ditch.

1.1.2 A request for a watching brief during the works was made by Sue Farr, Wiltshire County Council's Assistant Archaeologist, as the site lies within Avebury World Heritage Site. OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would undertake the watching brief (OA 2006).

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The pumping station site lies on low-lying land west of Avebury village at c 156 m OD m above OD (Fig. 1) and near to where the Winterbourne branch of the river Kennet crosses the footpath between Avebury and Avebury Trusloe. The site is situated on Upper and Middle Chalk.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared for the WSI for the project (OA 2006) and is reproduced below.

1.3.2 The site is located within an archaeologically sensitive area, which now forms part of the Avebury World Heritage Site (EH 2005). The Thames Water Pumping Station is located between the villages of Avebury and Avebury Trusloe and close to two medieval manor houses. The site is within the known extent of the medieval village earthworks.

1.3.3 Avebury World Heritage Site is renowned for its concentration of prehistoric ceremonial monuments dating to the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age. The site is within 500 m of the Avebury Henge monument and within view of Silbury Hill.

1.3.4 The line and extent of the Beckhampton Megalithic Avenue has recently been investigated by a five-year archaeological research project (Josh Pollard *et al*). The Avenue is known to have been around 15 m to 20 m wide and to extend from Avebury High Street at its east end to at least the “Adam and Eve” Stones in Longstones Field to the west. The exact line of the Avenue in places is still uncertain, especially in the area between Avebury and Trusloe, where it must have crossed the river. It was thought possible that the Avenue could pass close to the Thames Pumping Station and evidence for it (in terms of buried Sarsen stones or stone holes) could be present within the drainage ditch.

1.4 Acknowledgements

1.4.1 OA extends its thanks to the contractors, supplied by Kennet DC, who were helpful at all times during the excavations. OA’s Andy Simmonds carried out the watching brief, which was managed by Melanie Pomeroy-Kellinger.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 To record the presence/absence, date, character, quality, significance and state of preservation of any archaeological remains exposed during the groundworks. In this case, particular attention was to be paid for the potential for buried Sarsen stones or evidence for stone holes.

2.1.2 To signal, before the destruction of the material in question, the discovery of a significant archaeological find, for which the resources allocated were not sufficient to support a treatment to a satisfactory and proper standard.

2.1.3 To make available the results of the investigation.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 An OA supervisor was in attendance during all excavation works. Methodology was detailed in the WSI.

2.2.2 A plan of the works was made (Fig. 2) and a photographic record of the works kept in colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits within drainage trench

South of Pumping Station

3.1.1 South of the pumping station the new ditch was excavated through the fills of a previous drainage ditch. The new ditch was 1.5 m wide and 0.25 m deep and cut through a dark grey humic silt fill that contained few inclusions. Victorian/20th

century pottery sherds were observed in the fill together with modern debris including plastic and crisp packets. The finds were not retained. Natural was not observed in this length of the trench.

South-west of pumping station

- 3.1.2 Excavations were hampered by the presence of service pipes including a live electric cable. The trench was 0.7 m wide and 0.55 m deep. It was cut through 0.3 m of topsoil with chalk pieces and flint gravel over a 0.25 m+ thick layer of former topsoil/ploughsoil comprising light grey-brown clay silt. This deposit was not bottomed and no natural was observed in this stretch of the new ditch.

West of pumping station

- 3.1.3 The ditch was 1.5 m wide and 0.3 m deep here extending to the Winterbourne. The layers were the same as noted south-west of the pumping station. Natural was not observed.

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 A few sherds of Victorian/modern pottery were observed from the fill of the recent drainage trench. These, together with miscellaneous modern finds including plastic were evaluated on site but were not retained.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No deposits were deemed suitable for environmental sampling.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The watching brief was limited in nature. The new ditch was cut partly through a previous and comparatively modern drainage ditch. Recent topsoil was impacted together with a probable ploughsoil or former topsoil that produced no dating evidence. The finds were all clearly of modern date and there was no evidence for buried Sarsen stones or stone holes relating to the ancient monuments on the site.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

OA 2006 *Avebury Land Drainage Works. Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief.*

English Heritage 2005 *Avebury WHS Management Plan*

OAU 1992 *Fieldwork Manual* (1st Edition. Ed. D Wilkinson, August 1992)

APPENDIX 2 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Avebury Land Drainage Works (Thames Water Pumping Station)

Site code: AVLD 2006

Grid reference: SU 03700

Type of watching brief: Monitoring of drainage trench

Date and duration of project: June 5th, 6th, 7th 2006

Area of site: 0.5 ha.

Summary of results: Fill deposits of recent drainage ditch identified together with topsoil and ploughsoil/former topsoil (undated). No archaeological remains were noted.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Alexander Keiller Museum, Avebury, in due course, under the following accession number: TBC



Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location

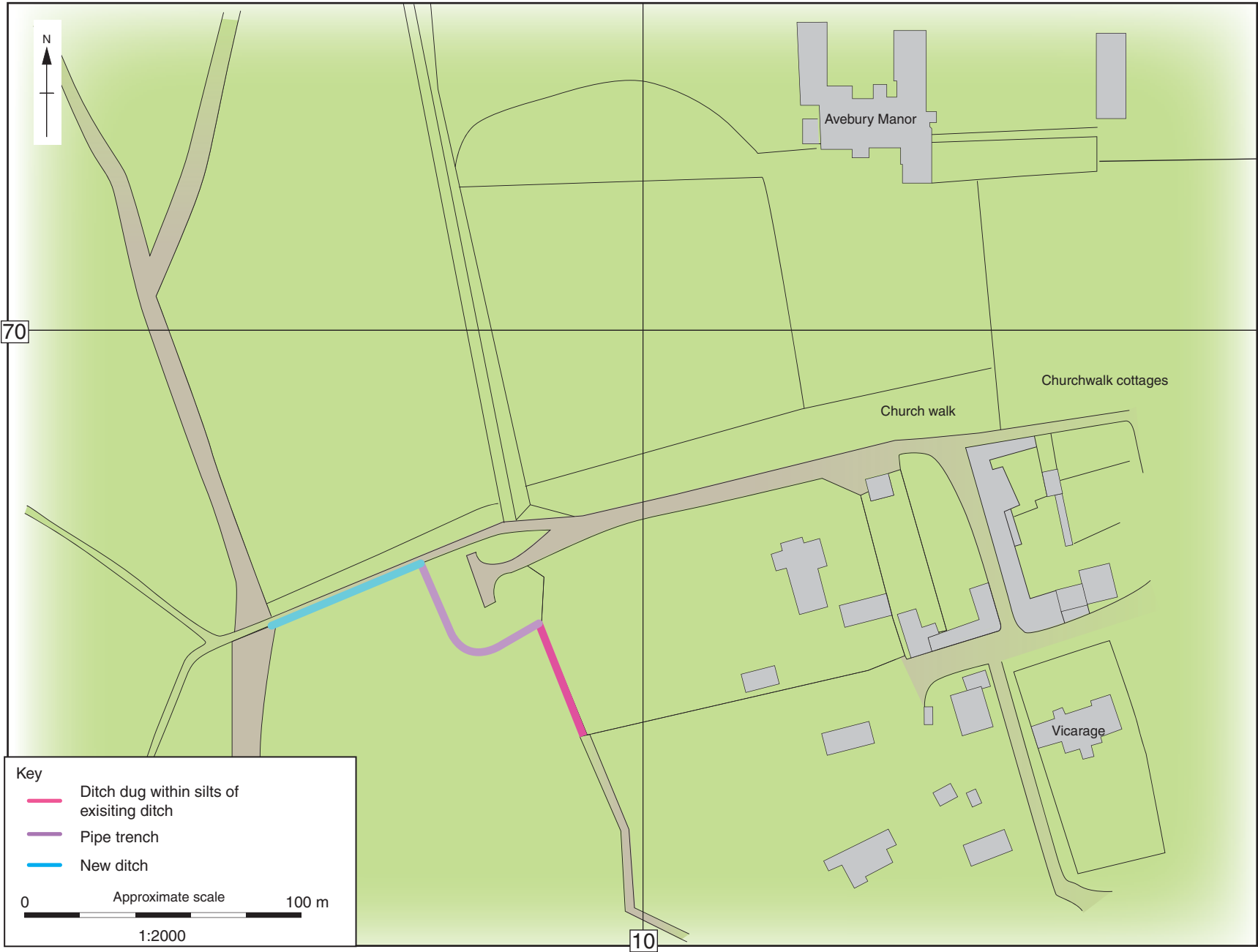


Figure 2: Extent of drainage works