

Overhead Electricity Cable Realignment and Pole Renewal near Brasenose Farm Steeple Aston Oxfordshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



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Overhead Electricity Cable Realignment and Pole Renewal, near Brasenose Farm, Steeple Aston, Oxfordshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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Front cover: Pole replacement works

SUMMARY

On April 15th 2010, Oxford Archaeology South completed an archaeological watching brief on land to the north-west of Brasenose Farm, Steeple Aston, Oxfordshire. The work was commissioned by Scottish and Southern Energy, as part of the realignment of overhead power cable poles within an area close to archaeological features identified by aerial photographs. The watching brief recorded a ditch that is likely to have been a post-medieval field boundary.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 In April 2010, Oxford Archaeology South (OAS) carried out an archaeological watching brief on land north-west of Brasenose farm, Steeple Aston, Oxfordshire between (NGR) SP 456 264 and SP 461 268. The work was commissioned by Scottish and Southern Energy (SSE), to record disturbance to any potential archaeological deposits alongside the works to replace overhead power cable poles.

1.1.2 The monitoring and recording was limited to a defined area of archaeological potential identified by the presence of cropmarks. Due to the potential of this part of the scheme, Richard Oram of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service (OCAS - ref: RO/0992) requested that a watching brief be undertaken. Prior to the fieldwork attendance, OAS produced a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how the archaeological requirements of the work would be met and agreed the content with OCAS.

1.2 Location, geology and topography

1.2.1 The site of the watching brief was located 15 km south of the town of Banbury and 1.5 km west of the village of Steeple Aston and north-west of the Hopcroft's Holt road junction. The power line is sited on land between Brasenose Farm and Horsehay Farm and runs on a NE-SW alignment (Fig. 1).

1.2.2 The line of the poles is situated on gently sloping ground at a maximum level of 153 m aOD to the north-west, running down to a level of 140 m aOD to the south-east of the pole alignment. The existing power line runs across two fields currently utilised as arable land separated by a hawthorn hedge.

1.2.3 The underlying geology is Great Oolitic Limestone (Geological Survey of Great Britain, sheet no 218).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 A series of archaeological features and possible features have been identified by aerial photographs at the site, and within its immediate surroundings. Most notably a possible banjo enclosure (PRN 15966) is close to the powerline alignment at SP 4585

2672. A possible trackway or other linear feature (PRN 13756) is recorded to the immediate south of this. Other enclosures have also been identified to the south-east of the powerline.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of any archaeological remains that may be affected by the pole replacement.
- 2.1.2 To preserve by record any archaeological deposits or features that may be disturbed or destroyed during any intrusive groundworks.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The work comprised the excavation of five pole foundation trenches, (Fig. 2). The trenches were excavated under close archaeological supervision using a tracked mechanical excavator fitted with a 0.75 m wide bucket. The excavated material was removed in spits until the required depth was achieved. The foundation trenches averaged 1.8 m in length, 0.75 m in width and were excavated to a depth of 1.5 m below the existing ground level. All spoil was examined for artefacts.
- 2.2.2 A plan of the trench locations was drawn at a scale of 1:100 and sections were recorded at a drawn scale of 1:20 (Fig. 2). All excavations, features and sections were photographed using digital photography and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was also made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the OA Field Manual (Wilkinson 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 The results from the five excavated trenches are presented below. Full context details can be found in Appendix 1.

Pole trench 1 (Section 1)

- 3.1.2 The underlying limestone natural (13), was encountered at a depth of 1.5 m below ground level. This was overlain by a 1.1 m thick layer of pale yellow-brown sandy-silt clay with off-white fractured and weathered limestone pieces (12) that probably derived from colluvial accumulation on the slope. Overlying layer 12 was a 0.15 m thick layer of light reddish-brown clay silt (11), which possibly represents an earlier ploughsoil horizon below the modern ploughsoil (10).

Pole trench 2 (Section 2)

- 3.1.3 The limestone natural (23) was encountered at a depth of 1.15 m below ground level and was overlain by a 0.7 m thick layer of pale yellow-brown sandy silt clay (22), a probable continuation of the colluvium (12) noted in Trench 1.
- 3.1.4 The colluvium was overlain by a 0.15 m thick layer of orange-brown clay silt (21), an equivalent to layer (11). This was overlain by the modern ploughsoil (20).

Pole trench 3 (Section 3)

- 3.1.5 Trench 3 was located immediately north of an existing field boundary separating the two fields within the investigation area.
- 3.1.6 The limestone natural (34) was encountered at a depth of 0.4 m below ground level, and was cut at the southern-eastern edge of the trench by a shallow linear ditch (33), running approximately parallel with the existing field boundary. The ditch was 0.5 m deep and was in excess of 1 m wide. It was infilled with a yellow-brown silt clay (32), a probable silting deposit.
- 3.1.7 The ditch fill was overlain by a 0.2 m thick layer of reddish orange-yellow silt clay (31), which is likely to represent an earlier ploughsoil horizon. This was overlain by the modern ploughsoil (30), that was up to 0.35 m thick.

Pole trench 4 (Section 4)

- 3.1.8 The limestone natural (42) was encountered at a depth of 0.45 m below ground level. Overlying this layer was a 0.25 m thick deposit of reddish orange-yellow silt clay (41), a probable continuation of the earlier ploughsoil horizon (31). The soil horizon was overlain by a 0.22 m thick layer of modern ploughsoil (40).

Pole trench 5 (Section 5)

- 3.1.9 The limestone natural (52) was encountered at a depth of 0.45 m below ground level. It was overlain by a 0.25 m thick buried soil horizon (51), the equivalent to the probable earlier ploughsoil horizons (31) and (41). This was overlain by a 0.22 m thick layer of the modern ploughsoil (50).

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 Fragments of modern pottery and brick were found throughout the current ploughsoil (10, 20, 30, 40 and 50). The presence of the finds was recorded but not retained due to the modern origin and associated context of discovery. No other dating evidence was encountered.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling and analysis were encountered.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 3.3.2 The underlying oolitic limestone natural was encountered in each of the pole foundation trenches. Within the southernmost field the limestone was overlain by a thick layer of colluvium, which decreased in depth towards the west. In the northern field the colluvium was not encountered perhaps reflecting differing levels of historical plough erosion and field use.
- 3.3.3 The NW-SE aligned ditch (33) observed within Trench 3 was cut directly into the natural limestone. This feature runs parallel to the current field boundary, a hawthorn hedge, and probably represents an earlier phase of field boundary and it seems most plausible that this has a post-medieval origin. The present hedge was planted along the eastern edge of the ditch.
- 3.3.4 The ditch fill was overlain by an earlier ploughsoil that was of uncertain date. The presence of 20th-century pottery and brick within the modern ploughsoil is indicative of modern manuring practises, consistent with the arable use of the land.
- 3.3.5 No evidence for any deposits or features associated with the banjo enclosure or trackway was encountered during the course of the watching brief.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

| <i>Context</i> | <i>Type</i> | <i>Depth</i> | <i>Comments</i> | <i>Finds</i> | <i>Date</i> |
|----------------|-------------|--------------|--|----------------|-------------|
| Pole trench 1 | | | | | |
| 10 | Layer | 0.3 m | Modern ploughsoil | - | C20th |
| 11 | Layer | 0.15 m | Possibly earlier ploughsoil | - | - |
| 12 | Layer | 0.9 m | Probable colluvium | - | - |
| 13 | Layer | >0.2 m | Limestone | - | - |
| Pole trench 2 | | | | | |
| 20 | Layer | 0.3 m | Modern ploughsoil | Brick, pottery | C20th |
| 21 | Layer | 0.18 m | Possibly earlier ploughsoil | - | - |
| 22 | Layer | 0.7 m | Probable colluvium | - | - |
| 23 | Layer | >0.6 m | Limestone | - | - |
| Pole trench 3 | | | | | |
| 30 | Layer | 0.3 m | Modern ploughsoil | Brick | C20th |
| 31 | Layer | 0.2 m | Possibly earlier ploughsoil | - | - |
| 32 | Fill | 0.45 m | Fill of ditch, probable silting deposit | - | - |
| 33 | Ditch | 0.45 m | Ditch, predates the current field boundary | - | - |
| 34 | Layer | >1.3 m | Limestone | - | - |
| Pole trench 4 | | | | | |
| 40 | Layer | 0.25 m | Modern ploughsoil | Brick, pottery | C20th |
| 41 | Layer | 0.2 m | Possibly earlier ploughsoil | - | - |
| 42 | Layer | >1.3 m | Limestone | - | - |
| Pole trench 5 | | | | | |
| 50 | Layer | 0.25 m | Modern ploughsoil | Brick, pottery | C20th |
| 51 | Layer | 0.2 m | Possibly earlier ploughsoil | - | - |
| 52 | Layer | >1.3 m | Limestone | - | - |

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Geological Survey of Great Britain, sheet no **218**, 1:25000

Wilkinson, D (ed.), 1992 Field Manual, unpublished OA report

OA, 2010 Overhead Electricity Cable Realignment and Pole Renewal near Brasenose Farm, Steeple Aston, Oxfordshire, Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief, unpublished OA client document

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Overhead Electric Cable Realignment and Pole Renewal near Brasenose Farm, Steeple Aston, Oxfordshire

Site code: STASPW 10

Grid reference: SP 456 264 to SP 461 268

Type of watching brief:

Machine excavation of 5 trenches for new overhead electricity poles

Date and duration of project: 15th April 2010, 1 day

Area of site: N/A

Summary of results:

On April 15th 2010, Oxford Archaeology South completed an archaeological watching brief on land to the north-west of Brasenose Farm, Steeple Aston, Oxfordshire. The work was commissioned by Scottish and Southern Energy, as part of the realignment of overhead power cable poles within an area close to archaeological features identified by aerial photographs. The watching brief recorded an undated ditch, which was overlain by a buried ploughsoil horizon.

Location of archive:

The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course under the accession number; OXCMS:2010.26.



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