

Powerline Pole Replacement Arncott to Bicester Oxfordshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



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Powerline Pole Replacement, Arncott to Bicester, Oxfordshire

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Table of Contents

Summary.....	2
1 Introduction.....	2
1.1 Scope of work.....	2
1.2 Location, geology and topography.....	2
1.3 Archaeological and historical background.....	2
2 Project Aims and Methodology.....	3
2.1 Aims.....	3
2.2 Methodology.....	4
3 Results.....	4
3.1 Description of deposits.....	4
3.2 Finds.....	4
3.3 Environmental remains.....	4
4 Discussion and Conclusions.....	4
Appendix A. Archaeological Context Inventory.....	5
Appendix B. Bibliography and References.....	6
Appendix C. Summary of Site Details.....	7

List of Figures

Fig. 1 Site location

Fig. 2 Trench location and section 1



Summary

On the 6th of September 2011 Oxford Archaeology (OA) undertook an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of a trench for a replacement electricity pole south of Bicester and north of the old Romano-British town of Alchester. A layer of modern ploughsoil sealing an earlier, undated, worked soil horizon was observed. No archaeological features, deposits or residual finds was encountered.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 SSE are undertaking refurbishment of the overhead power cables between Arcott and Bicester. As part of this work pole replacement was required at a single location to the south of Bicester, Oxfordshire (Fig. 1).
- 1.1.2 The location of the pole falls within the area identified by Oxfordshire County Council Archaeological Service (OCCAS) as having potential remains being associated with the Roman Settlement at Alchester. OCC recommended that any work within this area should therefore be subject to an archaeological watching brief. SSE commissioned Oxford Archaeology South (OAS) to undertake the works during the excavation of a trench for the new pole. OAS produced a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) approved by OCC prior to site works detailing how this would be completed in line with regional and national guidelines.

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The pole for replacement is identified as Pole 47 (Fig. 2, P47) located in level open arable farmland south of Bicester, in an area bounded by the A41, the Oxford to Bicester rail line, a garden centre and a sewage works (Fig. 1). The pole is located approximately at SP 5797 2161 at a height of approximately 65m aOD.
- 1.2.2 The superficial geology is recorded as Alluvium over Kellaway Clay (British Geological Survey, Sheet 219).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The site lies within the area studied by an earlier Desktop Assessment produced by OAS. This was centred on an area to the west of Oxford Road and north-west of the pole (OA 2002). The assessment identified seven sites of archaeological interest within a 500 m radius of the pole.
- Roman Settlement on Oxford Road. Remains of a Romano-British settlement possibly representing one or a group of farmsteads. Also possibility of water management on site. Evaluation in advance of Retail Village in 1993 and excavated in 1994. (SMR no. 15867)
 - Roman Road from Dorchester to Towcester. Now Oxford Road (A421) (SMR no. 8922)
 - Roman and Post-Medieval pottery found at site of Happy Eater restaurant beside Oxford Road. Metal detectorist found 6 Romano British sherds, 2 Medieval sherds and 13 post medieval sherds and 18 pieces of post-medieval tile and 43 metal items including 1 RB coin (SMR no. 15846)



- Cropmarks seen in aerial photos of linear ditches and trackways, possible field system between Oxford Road and Middleton Stoney Road. Geophysical survey found a complex of linear and discrete cut features which may form enclosures. Also a possible entrance way at north-east corner and boundary ditch. Probable Iron Age/Romano-British date (SMR no. 11214).
 - 2 Ring Ditches centred at SP 575 217 Located from aerial photographs (NMR no. 338911).
 - Roman Coin hoard, 440 4th Century coins minted between 317 and 348 A.D. discovered on a farm near Bicester in July 1979. No container. Coins were examined by Ashmolean and returned to finder (NMR no. 338914).
 - Axe Head. Butt end of polished stone axe head found at Langford Farm near Bicester (SMR no. 7505).
- 1.3.2 The site of the pole is approximately 1,000 m north-east of the Roman town of Alchester which is a Scheduled Monument.
- 1.3.3 In addition to the data above as presented from the 2002 study, information from more recent studies has been provided by Richard Oram, Planning Archaeologist for Oxfordshire County Council. These are summarised below from that information.
- 1.3.4 Geophysical survey and subsequent evaluation was undertaken in 2007 and a watching brief in 2010/11 along the route of a Thames Water pipeline within the same field as Pole 47. The watching brief examined an area immediately east of the overhead power line and poles. The 2007 evaluation comprised 31 trenches and recorded an 'a quantity of exceptionally well preserved Mesolithic flint, possibly indicative of a nearby in-situ Mesolithic deposits' as well as evidence of late Prehistoric and Roman settlement in the form of postholes, drip gullies and ditches (PRN 26128). The Watching brief recorded an 18th-century rough surface, probably to alleviate boggy ground, as well as an undated boundary ditch also to the immediate east of the overhead power line (EOX 3087).
- 1.3.5 In addition an evaluation to the east of the railway line at Langford Park Farm revealed activity dated to the late Iron Age and early Roman date periods. Presence of wall plaster suggests a durable building within vicinity of site. Also identified were features containing late Saxon material suggesting that an occupation site of this period may be present nearby (EOX 3042, PRN 18093) The area adjacent to, and east of, the Retail Village has also been the subject of an evaluation which revealed a dense scatter of Roman features on raised ground between two palaeo-channels (PRN 26005).
- 1.3.6 West of the A41, the area of the current Kingsmere development, was the subject of an extensive archaeological evaluation and targeted excavation carried out by Wessex Archaeology (PRN 26347). This recorded a later prehistoric and Roman settlement.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The aims of the watching brief were to:

- (i) Preserve by record any archaeological deposits encountered during the course of ground intrusions;
- (ii) Seek to establish the extent, nature and date of any archaeological deposits encountered within the scope of the ground intrusion;



- (iii) To secure the analysis, conservation and long-term storage of any artefactual/ecofactual material recovered from the site.;
- (iv) To disseminate results through the production of a grey literature report.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief was conducted as a continuous archaeological supervision during the excavation of the new trench and the removal of the old pole. The trench was excavated by a tracked excavator fitted with a 0.6 m wide toothless bucket.
- 2.2.2 All features and deposits were issued with unique context numbers, and context recording was in accordance with established OAS practices. All contexts were allocated unique numbers. No archaeological finds were encountered and no samples were taken. Black-and-white negative photographs and a digital photographic record were taken of the trench, general settings and recorded sections.
- 2.2.3 A sample section of the trench was drawn at a scale of 1:20 and a site plan showing the location of the pole and trench compiled.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 The top of the underlying natural, a pale yellow-brown silt clay (3) was encountered at a depth of 0.53m below the current ground level (Fig. 2, Section 1). This deposit also contained lenses of orange sand which increased with depth. This layer could be seen to be in excess of 1.2m deep within the section of the trench.
- 3.1.2 Overlying the natural was a 0.25m deep layer of dark brown silt clay soil (2). The composition of this deposit suggests that it has been worked/ploughed. No dating evidence was recovered.
- 3.1.3 This context was covered by a 0.28m deep layer of dark yellow-brown clayey silt soil (1), the present day ploughsoil. This deposit produced fragments of 19th century stoneware (a large flagon) and modern plastic and iron detritus together with abraded medium to large fragments of limestone.

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 Only layer 1 produced any artefacts/dating evidence. The presence of the obviously modern material together with the stone was recorded but they were not retained.

3.3 Environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were observed.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The buried soil horizon (2) is a probable layer of ploughsoil. No visible remains of ridge and furrow survive within the field although this is the likely source of the deposit.
- 4.1.2 Layer 1 is the present day ploughsoil. The abraded fragments of limestone observed within this context are most likely to derive from the bedrock Cornbrash geology adjacent to the Kellaway Clay within this field towards the western boundary.



APPENDIX A. ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Depth	Width	Length	Comments	Finds	Date
1	Layer	0.28m	-	-	Modern ploughsoil	Iron, plastic, pottery, stone	C19th/ C20th
2	Layer	0.25m	-	-	Earlier worked soil horizon	-	-
3	Layer	> 1.2m	-	-	Natural clay	-	-



APPENDIX B. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

- OA 2002 *Land Off Middleton Stoney Road, Bicester, Oxfordshire: Desktop Assessment*
- OA 2011 *Powerline Pole Replacement, Arncott to Bicester, Oxfordshire: Written Scheme of Investigation*



APPENDIX C. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name:	Powerline Pole Replacement, Arncott to Bicester, Oxfordshire
Site code:	BIPOLE 11
Grid reference:	Centred on SP 5797 2161
Type of watching brief:	Machine excavation of a 7m by 1.6m by 1.7m deep trench for a replacement electricity pole
Date and duration of project:	6th September 2011, one day
Area of site:	Approximately 14m ²
Summary of results:	The watching brief observed a undated buried soil horizon overlaid by modern ploughsoil. No other significant archaeological evidence was observed.
Location of archive:	The archive will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum Service under the accession number: OXCMS:2011.152



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Figure 1: Site location



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