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CORPORATION FARM, WILSHAM ROAD, ABINGDON, OXON  
WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

NGR SU 4960 9598

1993

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**INTRODUCTION**

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Corporation Farm during January and February 1993, on behalf of Orbit Housing Association. The planning proposal involved the construction of 24 houses. The discussion here involves the watching brief which took place during the construction. The WB was commissioned by Leadbitter Construction.

The site is one kilometre directly south of the centre of Abingdon and 100m W of the River Thames. Situated on Wilsham Road and just north of Andersey Way. A total of eight trenches were machine excavated in the evaluation, each 15m in length. A ring ditch was identified in trench probably Bronze Age in date.

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND**

Corporation Farm lies within a complex archaeological landscape which also relates to the wider prehistoric landscape N and S of Abingdon (R. Holgate 1986) (M. Parrington 1974) (Briggs et al 1986). This is beyond the scope of this discussion due to the limited amount of archaeology exposed in the evaluation.

Aerial photography by Major Allen in 1933 and the NMR in 1970 showed circular and rectangular cropmarks concentrated immediately S of Corporation Farm (D. Benson and D. Miles 1974). There are at least twenty recognisable ring ditches making up a large barrow cemetery (Sites and Monuments Record PRN 14278). They follow a NE to SW alignment. Several of these features have been examined in advance of gravel extraction.

The area immediately south of Corporation Farm was excavated in 1971/72 by the Abingdon and District Archaeological Society (CBA Group 9 1972, 1973, 1974). The main elements identified were:

1. Finds of microliths suggesting late mesolithic activity.
2. A Class II 'henge' type monument containing Grooved Ware, 15m x 14m with two entrances (PRN 4534).
3. A double inhumation.
4. A rectilinear enclosure and a curved enclosure with postholes for a roundhouse. This probably represents a middle Bronze Age farmstead, the only prehistoric domestic structure on the site, and a rare example in the Thames Valley.
5. Two large Bronze Age ring ditches; one of them (PRN 4533) slighting a small ring ditch.
6. A mid 2nd century AD enclosure with a well (PRN 4535).
7. Buildings in 5th and 6th century AD (PRN 8474).

**Bibliography**

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## RESULTS OF WATCHING BRIEF

Following the evaluation a targeted recording action was outlined by the County Archaeological Officer to date and phase the main features. The initial plans involved a topsoil strip and further removal of any layers contaminated by previous leather and tanning processes. Archaeological features would be revealed and excavated and recorded before further building work continued.

The situation changed when the revised ground work prior to the construction work involved sealing the site under one metre of clay to mitigate against the level of contamination.

In order to assess the contamination of the site a series of test pits were machine dug down to the natural gravel to take soil samples. These were examined as part of the watching brief but most of the test pits were too small to reveal any archaeological information. However they tended to show a fairly well preserved ploughsoil (a reddish brown sandy silt with about 15% gravel) on the W side of the site, typically 0.25m thick. The E side tended to show a shallow ploughsoil with more disturbance associated with the previous farm activity.

Due to the contamination the site was sealed by a dump of clay which averaged 0.70m in depth. This resulted in little below ground disturbance except where deep excavations were identified such as the new access road and a large soakaway.

The watching brief involved an inspection of the construction of the access road across the site. The first 20m of the access road was stripped down to the natural gravel. No features were seen which pre-dated the recent farm. At the NW corner of the site it was likely the road would locate evaluation trench 4 (OAU Jan/Feb 1993) which identified the ring ditch 4/6. The road strip was approximately 5.00m in width and up to 0.80m in depth. The section revealed that the stripping dug through the dumped clay and the bottom of the road strip corresponded to the previous level of the old farm prior to the clay being dumped at the beginning of the housing development.

The last phase of the watching brief on 3rd February 1994 involved the inspection of a soakaway (trench 9) at the NW corner of the site. The soakaway was situated just S of the access road 3.45m E of the wooden boundary fence. This area had considerable potential since it is just S of the evaluation trench 4 (OAU Jan/Feb 1993) which identified ring ditch 4/6.

The soakaway was 3.70m long 1.85m in width and 1.30m in depth and dug 0.64m into the natural gravel. A ditch cut was visible in section in the NW corner.

The depth, amount of loose soil and wet conditions meant a detailed examination of the feature was limited. To the N it was cut away by what appeared to be a large 'pit'; however it seems probable that this 'pit' could in fact be the cut for the S end of evaluation trench 4 (OAU Jan/Feb 1993). No finds were recovered from the ditch but the soakaway did confirm the sharply curving nature of the ditch identified in the evaluation. From the length exposed in the evaluation the outside diameter is estimated to be approximately 17m.

Five smaller soakaway trenches were dug in the gardens of the houses to the S of the large soakaway, none of these could be examined in any detail due to their size and depth, but an earlier ploughsoil was present and no features were seen.

## CONCLUSION

Due to the change in ground work the original targeted watching brief could not be undertaken. The clay used to seal the site prevented any large scale ground disturbance. The revised watching brief although identifying areas of impact from the building construction it provided no significant additional information on the ring ditch or the presence of any additional features not identified in the evaluation.

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