63 Bath Road, Thatcham, West Berkshire

An Archaeological Evaluation
for Renaissance Habitat

by Jo Pine
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code
63BRT06/120

September 2006
Summary

Site name: 63 Bath Road, Thatcham, West Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 50870 67630

Site activity: Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 24th August to 3rd September 2006

Project manager: Jo Pine

Site supervisor: Jo Pine

Site code: 63BRT06/102

Area of site: 795 sq m

Summary of results: Ditches and/or pit of late Iron Age and Roman date recorded in two of the three trenches.

Monuments identified: Ditches and/or pit

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at West Berkshire Museum in due course.

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford ✓ 2.10.06
                     Steve Preston ✓ 22.09.06
Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at 63 Bath Road, Thatcham, West Berkshire (SU 5087 6763) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Nick Turner of Renaissance Habitat, Wessex House, Oxford Road, Newbury, West Berkshire, RG14 1PA.

Planning permission (app no 06/01543/Outmaj) is to be sought from West Berkshire Council to redevelop the site for new flats following demolition of the existing structure. In order to provide sufficient information on the archaeological potential of the site, to inform the planning process and to mitigate the effects of the development, a field evaluation has been requested. This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment’s Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and West Berkshire Council’s policies on archaeology.

The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Duncan Coe, Archaeological Officer of West Berkshire Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by Jo Pine, Natasha Bennett and Andrew Taylor between the 24th August 2006 and the 3rd September 2006 and the site code is 63 BTR06/102. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at West Berkshire Museum in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on the western side of Thatcham on the north side of the A4 Bath Road. The area available for trenching comprised the garden of no 63 which lay to the north of the property and this consisted of several lawn areas punctuated by hedges and shrubs. Immediately behind the house was a bricked car parking area. The site was gently sloping to the north being 77.42m above Ordnance Datum on the south lawn and 77.27m on the northern lawn, the height of the Bath Road fronting the site being 77.9m. The underlying geology according to the geology maps is river and valley gravel (BGS 1971) and this was observed in all the trenches.
Archaeological background

The site lies within an area considered to be the location of a substantial Roman settlement. Numerous archaeological deposits have been recorded in this area of Thatcham over c. 600m east-west along the Bath Road with deposits recorded extending at least 150m to the north. A large number of these observations were made in the 1930s when the area was developed and deposits recorded include stone building foundations, stone-lined wells and a flue, spanning the 1st to 4th centuries AD but with an emphasis towards the later Roman period (Harris 1930; Harris 1937). More recent investigations include the evaluation of Henwick playing fields which lie to the west of the current proposal site, where ditches, pits and postholes of Roman date were located (Ford 1992). Closer to the site at 71 and 69 Bath Road, gullies and a posthole were recorded, the gully at no. 71 was Roman in date and the posthole at no. 69 is considered to be prehistoric (Taylor 2002, Anthony 2004). The route of the Roman road from Silchester to Cirencester runs possibly to the north of the current Bath Road and the projected line of the road crosses the proposal site (Margary 1973; Harris 1930; 1937)

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the area of development.

The specific research of this project are;

  To determine if archaeologically relevant levels have survived on this site.

  To determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present.

  To determine if there are any deposits relating to Roman occupation present on the site.

  To determine if there are any traces of the Roman road present on the site.

Three trenches were excavated by a Kubota (mini digger) machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket under continuous archaeological supervision. Their positions and lengths had to be altered slightly from those originally intended because of access difficulties due to presence of outbuildings, a large stand of trees at the northern end of the garden, smaller hedges and live services.

  A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1. Details of the archaeological features are tabulated in Appendix 2.
Results

Trench 1 (plate 1)

This was located at the northern end of the garden, aligned north-south and was 8.00m in length and 1.40m wide. The stratigraphy comprised topsoil 0.30m deep overlying a mid grey/brown clayey silt subsoil on average 0.30m deep. This in turn sealed a sandy gravel natural geology.

At the far northern end of the trench an archaeological feature (1) was observed (Plate 2). A slot revealed it to be a substantial feature at least 0.60m deep and 1.10m in width. It contained three fills (52, 56 and 57) two of which (52 and 56) contained sherds of pottery, those from 52 being middle Iron Age and late Iron Age in date, those from fill 58 being from towards the end of the late Iron Age. This feature was either a large pit or substantial ditch.

Slightly to the south of feature 1 was a shallow ditch (2) which was 1.40m in width and 0.22m deep aligned east-west. No finds were recovered from its two fills (53 and 58) and its relationship to feature (7) which was recorded just to the south could not be discerned from the section.

Feature 7 was very ephemeral on the surface but appeared to be another linear feature aligned in a similar direction to ditch 2. It was at least 1.20m wide, 1.40m east-west and 0.30m deep. It contained two fills (61 and 62) which were sandy silt deposits with frequent small rounded gravels. Again no finds were recovered from this feature.

At the southern end of the trench was a possible pit (6). It was at least 2.80m north-south, 1.40m east-west and 0.25m deep with a gentle concave side. No finds were recovered from its sandy silt fills (61 and 62).

Trench 2

This was aligned north-east- south-west and was only 4.10m long due to access and buried services. It showed similar stratigraphy to Trench 1: topsoil 0.20m deep overlying a mid grey/brown clayey silt subsoil 0.40m deep. This in turn sealed the sandy gravel natural geology which had been truncated by a linear or pit feature 5.

However, this feature is probably of modern origin as a sherd of mass-produced white earthenware of 19th/20th century date was recovered from its fill (63).

Trench 3

This trench was excavated through the southern lawn of the property, aligned north-south and was 8.00m in length and 1.40m wide. Topsoil 0.25m deep overlying a mid grey/brown clayey silt subsoil on average 0.35m
deep. This in turn sealed a sandy gravel natural geology. At the far northern end of the trench a shallow ditch (3) was recorded. It was 1.50m wide and 0.22m deep. Ten sherds of early Roman pottery and a tile fragment were recovered from the gravelly silt fill (54). At the far southern end of the trench, a pit or ditch (4) was recorded. It was at least 1.30m north-south, 1.40m east-west and four sherds of early Roman pottery recovered from the surface of the fill (55), along with three fragments of fired clay. After consultation with the archaeological monitor it was decided not to excavate this feature as it would either be preserved in situ or might be better excavated under conditions pertaining to full excavation.

Finds

Pottery by Malcolm Lyne

The evaluation yielded 20 sherds (323g) of Middle-to-Late Iron Age and early 2nd century AD pottery from three features. A further, post-medieval, sherd came from Trench 2 (Appendix 3).

All of the assemblages were quantified by numbers of sherds and their weights per fabric. Fabrics were classified using a x8 magnification lens with inbuilt metric graticule for determining the natures, sizes, forms and frequencies of added inclusions. A numbered series was drawn up to cover all of the fabrics except the post-medieval (see Appendix 3 for details).

The fills of pit/ditch 1 (52 and 56) yielded three sherds in Middle-to-Late Iron Age fabrics 1 and 2, including a bead-rim fragment from a weak-profiled jar. The feature is more closely dated to c. 25 BC–AD 50/60 by three further fragments from a very-fine-grog-tempered ‘Belgic’ vessel with external polish and at least one raised cordon.

The fill of ditch 3 (54) produced a further 10 sherds of pottery comprising a fragment from a clay-roughcast decorated beaker in hard oxidized fabric 6 (c. AD 125–150) and nine fragments from a neck-cordoned jar in grey fabric 7, probably a Savernake product (c. AD 50–150). This suggests an early 2nd century AD date for the feature.

Feature 4 was not excavated but the four sherds from the exposed surface of its fill include a fragment from a flanged dish in Dorset Black Burnished ware (c. AD 120–160) and two jar fragments in similar fabric. This suggests that the feature may also be of early 2nd century AD date.

Other Finds

A shard of cyan/green glass was recovered from the spoil heap of Trench 1. A clay pipe stem was recovered from the spoil heap of Trench 2.
Conclusion

This evaluation has located a high density of archaeological features in the form of ditches and possible pits. The dating of these features suggests occupation on the site in the Iron Age through to the 2nd century AD. Unlike in other parts of Thatcham, there was no evidence of later Roman occupation here; but this may be a result of the small sample. The features in the majority appear to be well defined and well preserved with little truncation, they also contain substantial assemblages of pottery. No trace of the Roman road was revealed during the fieldwork, however it may lie under the footprint of the present house.

The findings of this evaluation taken with what is already known archaeologically about the area indicate that the site lies within an area of significant archaeological interest and has high potential. It appears to be within the large Roman roadside settlement proposed by Harris and there is an indication of earlier (Iron Age) activity, possibly settlement on the site.

References

Ford, S, 1992, ‘Henwick Lane, Thatcham, Berkshire: an archaeological evaluation’, Thames Valley Archaeological Services rep 92/01, Reading
Harris, W E, 1930, ‘A Romano-British settlement at Thatcham Newtown, Berkshire’, Trans Newbury Dist Fld Club, 6, 6–17
Taylor, A, 2002, ‘Land to the rear of 71A Bath Road, Thatcham, Berkshire: an archaeological evaluation’, Thames Valley Archaeological Services rep 02/58, Reading
**APPENDIX 1: Trench details**

0m at S end

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trench No.</th>
<th>Length (m)</th>
<th>Breadth (m)</th>
<th>Depth (m)</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>0.65-0.70</td>
<td>Topsoil 0.30m deep overlying a mid grey brown clayey silt subsoil on average 0.30m deep. This sealed a sandy gravel natural geology. Ditch/pit(1), ditch 2 and 7; pit 6. [Plates 1 and 2]</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>Topsoil 0.20m deep overlying a mid grey brown clayey silt subsoil 0.40m deep. This in turn sealed the sandy gravel natural geology. Pit like feature (5) (modern).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>Topsoil 0.25m deep overlying a mid grey brown clayey silt subsoil on average 0.35m deep. This in turn sealed a sandy gravel natural geology. Ditch 3; pit/ditch 4</td>
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### APPENDIX 2: Feature details

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<tr>
<th>Trench</th>
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<th>Type</th>
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<th>Dating evidence</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>52, 56, 57</td>
<td>Pit/Ditch</td>
<td>Late Iron Age</td>
<td>Pottery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>53, 58</td>
<td>Ditch</td>
<td>Roman</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Ditch</td>
<td>Roman</td>
<td>Pottery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Pit/Ditch</td>
<td>Roman</td>
<td>Pottery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Pit/Ditch</td>
<td>Modern</td>
<td>Pottery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>61, 62</td>
<td>Pit/Ditch</td>
<td>Undated</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>59, 60</td>
<td>Pit/Ditch</td>
<td>Undated</td>
<td>-</td>
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APPENDIX 3: Pottery catalogue by context

<table>
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<th>Trench</th>
<th>Cut</th>
<th>Deposit</th>
<th>Fabric</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Date-range</th>
<th>Sherds</th>
<th>Wt (g)</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jar with cordon</td>
<td>Mid–late Iron Age</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bead-rim jar</td>
<td>Mid–late Iron Age</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Tin glaze</td>
<td>Open form</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Roughcast bkr</td>
<td>Middle to Late Iron Age</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Flanged dish</td>
<td>Middle to Late Iron Age</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Fabrics

1. Soft handmade fabric with profuse silt-sized to 0.10mm quartz fired polished black/brown with external polish. Middle to Late Iron Age
2. Handmade black fabric with up-to 2.00mm crushed calcite and very-fine quartz filler. Middle to Late Iron Age
3. ‘Belgic’ very-fine-grog tempered polished black fabric. c.25BC-AD.50/60
4. Handmade brown-black fabric with 1.00 to 2.00mm black and red ferrous inclusions, coarse grog, silt and chaff impressions. Middle to Late Iron Age
5. Dorset Black-Burnished Ware (BB1)
6. Rough pink-orange fabric with sparse 0.10mm multi-coloured quartz filler and clay rough casting
7. Wheel-turned pink fabric with profuse up-to 1.00mm red ferrous and soft white inclusions and up-to 0.50mm rounded white and rose quartz filler, fired smooth grey/black. A Savernake kilns product
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Figure 1. Location of site within Thatcham and Berkshire.

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Figure 2. Location of site on Bath Road.

Scale 1:1250
63 Bath Road, Thatcham, West Berkshire 2006

Figure 4. Plan of Trenches
Figure 4. Plan of Trenches

63 Bath Road, Thatcham, West Berkshire 2006
Figure 5. Sections
Plate 1. Trench 1 looking south, Scale: 1m.

Plate 2. Trench 1, feature 1 looking east, Vertical scale 1m, horizontal scale 0.5m.