Land at Lane End, Devil’s Highway, Crowthorne, Berkshire

An Archaeological Evaluation

for Millgate Homes

by Helen Moore
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code LEC/03/112

December 2003
Summary

Site name: Land at Lane End, Devil’s Highway, Crowthorne

Grid reference: SU 8271 6424

Site activity: Archaeological Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 9th–11th December 2003

Project manager: Helen Moore

Site supervisor: Helen Moore

Site code: LEC 03/112

Area of site: c. 2400 sq m.

Summary of results: A medieval gully (12th–14th centuries), an undated gully, and another possible gully were recorded from the five trenches. No Roman finds or features were found. A boundary hedge on the line of the Roman Road was a recent plantation associated with the previous dwelling.

Monuments identified: None

Location and reference of archive: The archive is currently held by Thames Valley Archaeological Services, 47–49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5NR and will be deposited with Reading Museum in due course.

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford 14.12.03
                       Steve Preston 15.12.03
Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out on land at Lane End, Devil’s Highway, Crowthorne, Berkshire (SU 8271 6424) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Greg Meier on behalf of Millgate Homes, Millgate Court, Terrace Road North, Binfield, Berkshire RG42 5HZ.

Planning permission (application no F/2002/8018) has been granted by Wokingham District council, for the construction of four new houses on the site following the demolition of the existing house. The planning permission was subject to a condition which required an archaeological evaluation to be undertaken to assess whether archaeological deposits were present on the site. This would enable a plan to be formulated to mitigate the effects of development upon any surviving archaeology.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment’s Planning Policy Guidance, Archaeology and Planning (PPG16 1990), and the District’s policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr K. Beachus of Babtie, archaeological advisers to Wokingham District Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by Helen Moore and Pamela Jenkins, on 9th–11th of December 2003 and the site code is LEC03/112. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Reading Museum in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located at the very end of Lane End, Crowthorne immediately adjacent to the golf course. The site lies on the margins of a built-up area, which locally comprises large houses with substantial gardens and mature trees. A large number of mature trees stand within the grounds of the site, many with Tree Protection Orders. The grounds are fairly flat, and rise slightly to the south. A small stream runs along the boundary of the site to the west and a steep bank drops to the stream. The golf course is immediately to the north of the site and a line of large oak trees demarcates the boundary. The projected line of the Roman road known as the Devil’s Highway is though to pass just beyond the southern boundary of the site. The line of this road is a public footpath at this point. The site is fairly flat at 68.60m above Ordnance Datum, with the southern edge, adjacent to the Devil’s Highway at 69.00m AOD.
The underlying geology is alluvium according to the British Geological Survey (BGS, 1981). Bracklesham Beds cover the area around the site. The geology observed in the trenches was generally a mottled fine sand with a mixture of cream, yellow, and green colours with patches of a greeny-orange clay. Topsoil (50) was generally 0.10m thick, and underlying this immediately above the mottled fine sand, was a mid orange-brown fine sand subsoil (51) which varied in thickness from 0.11m-0.40m.

**Archaeological background** (Figs. 1, 5)

The major archaeological landscape feature known from this particular part of Crowthorne is the Roman road from London (Londinium) to Silchester (Calleva Atrebatum), known as the Devil’s Highway. This road runs along the southern edge of the site and forms the approach road to the group of large houses bordering the golf course. The London to Silchester road was a first-class Roman road (Margary’s route 4a, under the system of road numbering where single digits are for important roads, double digits for secondary roads and three digits for minor roads) and was the most important thoroughfare to all the western parts of the province (Margary 1955). It left London at Newgate and ran in a south-westerly direction past Staines, and then changed alignment to head almost due west at Bagshot Park running the last 17 miles to Silchester on this alignment. This part of the road was such an obvious landscape feature in later eras that it became known as the Devil’s Highway as it was such a strange and notable spectacle (Margary 1955). The ground begins to fall towards Crowthorne and the road runs through cuttings or on terraces and the roadside ditches disappear. The *agger* or causeway of the road is 7.20m wide as it runs through the woods towards Crowthorne, and Margary described it as clearly visible in the grounds of Lane End in 1955.

Several substantial settlements are known along the line or close to the Roman road in East Berkshire (Ford 1987). At Wickham Bushes a large settlement has been excavated revealing activity dating from the 1st to 4th centuries AD with masonry buildings and also timber structures extending over a considerable area. Seven villas have been recorded from the East Berkshire area which include at least three aisled buildings and other features lying adjacent to the Roman road at Finchampstead. Their proximity to each other suggests they are part of a larger complex which grew up near the road. The imperial post (*cursus publicus*) would have required services at regular intervals along principal roads so it is a possibility that settlements would have then developed in these areas due to the passing trade (Millett 1998).
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. In particular it was important to ascertain if any remnants of a roadside settlement or features survived adjacent to or near the Roman road, the Devil’s Highway. A secondary objective was to ascertain the historic significance of the southern boundary hedge of the site which lay adjacent to the line of the Roman road.

Five trenches were excavated in the locations of the proposed footings of the new houses. The locations of the trenches were also constrained by the need to avoid the roots and canopy of the protected trees. As a consequence, Trench 2 was slightly shorter than the intended 30m, but other trenches were extended to compensate. A live gas pipe was encountered while digging Trench 5a which inhibited excavation in the area near the Devil’s Highway, and an extension (Trench 5b) was excavated to allow for the loss of area in Trench 5a. Services were also encountered in Trenches 1 and 3.

All the trenches were excavated using a 360° machine, fitted with a 1.5m toothless ditching bucket, and supervised by an archaeologist at all times. Spoil heaps were monitored for finds.

A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

Results (Figs 2–4)

Trench 1

This was located on the northern part of the site (Fig. 2) and dog-legged at the north-eastern end due to a misalignment during machining. The trench was 23.5m long to the point of the re-alignment and then extended for a further 9.20m. It was aligned roughly south-east to north-west. Below 0.10m of topsoil, was a mid orangey brown fine sand subsoil (51), 0.10m–0.40m thickness. The natural geology was a fine sand, mottled cream, green and orange in colour. A small gully (1) aligned north-east to south-west truncated the natural sand at 18.20m along the trench from the south-east end. It was slightly curved in plan with a V-shaped profile. It was filled with a soft mid orange-brown fine sand (52) with moderate sub-rounded gravel inclusions. No finds were retrieved from the fill, and 50% of the length of the gully contained within the trench was excavated. It was 1.50m long, 0.40m wide and between 0.45–0.55m deep. No other archaeological features were observed along the length of the trench. The north-eastern end of the trench (near the realignment) contained a manhole and
water pipe and so the trench was slightly extended to compensate for the loss of length due to these modern intrusions.

Trench 2
This trench was aligned roughly east-west following the northern boundary with the golf course. It was 23.70m long due to the close proximity of a number of mature protected oak trees at the eastern end of the site, and 1.50m wide. The natural geology was a defined by bands of yellowish green sand and mottled green and yellow clay which sloped upwards from west to east. The depth of the trench varied between 0.21m at the east end, to 0.51m at the western end. Below 0.11m of topsoil lay subsoil (51). At the eastern end of the trench a possible gully (2) was cut into the natural sand, on an east-west alignment clipping the southern edge of the trench; the whole feature was not viewed in plan. It was possibly V-shaped in profile, although this could not be completely understood due to the closeness of the trench edge. It was 0.25m wide with a visible length of 1.55m, and was 0.21–0.35m deep. The fill (53) was mottled orange and green fine sand, and contained no finds. Disturbance adjacent to the cut appeared to be post-medieval. Gully (2) may be a natural feature similar to that investigated in Trench 4. The natural sand is very mobile and seems to create what look like edges of archaeological features, however when excavated the sands are interdigitated and are not of archaeological character. As so little of the feature was exposed here it is difficult to say, but it is a possibility that it may be natural. No other archaeological features were observed within the trench.

Trench 3 (Plate 2)
Trench 3 was aligned north south and was 36.80m long and 1.50m wide. It was disturbed by a modern pipe trench and soakaway. The northern end of the trench was substantially deeper at 0.60m than the southern end at 0.30m where the ground rises slightly. The natural was a mottled yellow-green fine sand. No archaeological features were observed.

Trench 4 (Plate 1)
Trench 4 was aligned roughly north-east to south-west, and was 29.40m long and 1.50m wide. The trench varied in depth from 0.77m at the north-east end to 0.35m at the south-west end. The natural geology comprised distinct bands of different coloured sands, predominantly green, cream and brown, with bands of greeny-orange clay, and orange sandy gravel. A gully (10) truncated the natural sand at the east end of the trench, aligned north-west
to south-east. It was 0.40m wide, with a visible length of 0.75m. It was very shallow at 0.09m deep with gently sloping sides and a fairly flat slightly concave base. Two slots were excavated through it (3, 4) and both fills contained medieval pottery. The fills (54, 55), were a pale cream fine sand with pale brown mottling. Two natural features were investigated at the western end of the trench which were originally thought to be possibly of archaeological origin. However, as described above the ‘dirty’ coloured sands and gravels were shown to be interleaving and indistinct and were presumed to be caused by the movement of water and shifting sands.

**Trench 5a**

Trench 5a was aligned east-west, and was located adjacent to the site boundary and the Devil’s Highway Roman road to ascertain if there was any indication of a road side settlement in this area. It was 30.70m long and 1.50m wide. It immediately became apparent once machining began that the trench was truncated by modern services, in particular a live gas pipe, and a electricity cable. The live gas pipe clipped the trench at an oblique angle and ran almost along the entire length. The trench was dug through the Tarmac driveway which presumably had removed any topsoil when it was constructed. Tarmac and hoggin lay immediately above 0.18m depth of subsoil. The natural geology was a pale yellow or buff silty sand with orange and mid brown patches. No archaeology was observed along the length of the trench.

**Trench 5b**

Trench 5b was dug as an extension to Trench 5a to try to ascertain if any archaeological deposits survived near the line of the Roman road that were not truncated by modern services. The trench was dug at a right-angle to Trench 5a, and was 2.6m long and 1.50m wide. Below 0.36m of topsoil was a series of banded interleaving layers of dirty sands which were machined to an arbitrary level to ascertain if they were natural deposits. The depth of the trench was 1.00m to 1.12m and was dug to just above the water table. No archaeological features or finds were observed.

**Historic assessment of the southern boundary hedge**

The southern boundary hedge which lies adjacent to the lie of the Roman Road, was assessed for its historic significance using historic maps, the Wokingham Sites and Monuments Record and hedgerow dating using Hooper’s Rule (Rackham 1986, 194–202). The road may have been an enduring feature of the landscape after Roman times and may have formed a boundary defined by a hedge from an early date.
It was immediately apparent on the inspection that the whole hedge was composed of just one species, holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), and this is almost certainly a species planted as a part of the creation of the boundary of the site in the 20th century. A few oak trees and conifers were present to the south of the hedge but these presumably lie on top of the Roman road and are remnants of the woodland that covered large parts of the Crowthorne area in Victorian and later times. Prior to this, the environs of the site on Rocque's map of 1761 are depicted as heathland and the line of the Roman road as a minor track or path. The hedge therefore does not have any archaeological significance.

**Finds**

*Pottery* by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised five sherds with a total weight of 54g. They were all from the same glazed jug, a product of the Ashampstead manufactory near Reading (Mepham and Heaton 1995). All five sherds came from gully 10: a single sherd weighing 10g was noted in slot 4 (55), the other four sherds were noted in slot 3 (54).

*Ashampstead ware*, 12th – 14th century. Sandy ware, from the kiln located c. 15km to the west of Reading, the main products being jars and highly decorated glazed jugs, the latter often having painted geometric slip designs. The vessel noted here has a dull green glaze over fine horizontal combing.

**Conclusion**

No finds or features dating to the Roman period were found on the site. However, a gully (10) of medieval date (12th to 14th centuries) was recorded in Trench 4, and another definite gully (1) of unknown date was found in Trench 1. A doubtful feature (2) was recorded in Trench 2.

The majority of the site was devoid of archaeological features suggesting that these gullies are isolated features, or are confined to the northern side of the site. The two gullies were disparate in profile and fills, possibly suggesting different functions or timescales, although it is very difficult to interpret the short lengths that were visible in terms of function and form. They may be related to agricultural activities or drainage, but without a larger view it is difficult to characterize them.

**References**


APPENDIX 1: Trench details
0m at south or west 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>23.5m+9.20m</td>
<td>1.50m</td>
<td>0.40m-0.70m</td>
<td>This trench was dug on two different alignments after the first was judged to miss the footings of the proposed new buildings. One small gully (1) was recorded, which was undated aligned north-south. No other finds or features were observed. The trench was truncated by a service trench and manhole.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>23.70m</td>
<td>1.50m</td>
<td>0.21m (E) 0.51m (W)</td>
<td>This trench was dug slightly shorter than intended because of the proximity to mature trees with protection orders. A possible gully (2) was recorded aligned east-west at the east end of the trench, and was truncated by a Post-Medieval feature. No other archaeological features or finds were observed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>36.80m</td>
<td>1.50m</td>
<td>0.60m (N) 0.30m (S)</td>
<td>The north end of this trench was much deeper than the south end, and was truncated by a soakaway. No finds or archaeological features were observed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>29.40m</td>
<td>1.50m</td>
<td>0.77m (E) 0.35m (W)</td>
<td>A gully (10) containing pottery was recorded at the east end of the trench. Natural banded sands were observed across the trench, and the natural was a mottled cream/brown/green bands of sand, clay and gravel. No other archaeological features were observed. [Plate 2]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5a</td>
<td>30.70m</td>
<td>1.50m</td>
<td>0.26m</td>
<td>This trench was aligned with the boundary hedge and the Roman Road, to locate any possible roadside archaeological features. The trench was truncated by a live gas pipe, and an electricity cable, and was dug through a tarmac path. No archaeological features were observed. [Plate 1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5b</td>
<td>2.62m</td>
<td>1.50m</td>
<td>1.00m-1.12m</td>
<td>This trench was dug to ascertain if there were any archaeological deposits immediately to the north of trench 5a as this trench was so truncated by modern services. This trench contained natural banded layers of sand, and silty-sand, dug to an arbitrary depth just above the water table. No archaeological features or finds were observed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX 2: Catalogue of features

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trench</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Deposit</th>
<th>Group No</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Dating</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Gully</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Possible gully</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Gully</td>
<td>12th-14th centuries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Gully</td>
<td>12th-14th centuries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td>Topsoil</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td></td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
<td>Subsoil</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lane End, Devils Highway, Crowthorne, Berkshire, 2003 Archaeological Evaluation

Figure 1. Location of site within Crowthorne and Berkshire.

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Figure 3. Plans of the archaeological features
Figure 4. Sections of the archaeological features

Land at Lane End, Devil’s Highway, Crownthorne, Berkshire 2003

LEC03/112

Trench 1

Trench 2

Trench 4

Trench 3

01 m
Land at Lane End, Devil’s Highway, Crowthorne, Berkshire, 2003

Figure 5. Map (not to scale) showing the London to Silchester Roman Road, the Devil’s Highway

Key
- Red: Roman Road from Silchester to London (The Devil’s Highway)
- Green: Roman Roads of Certain Course
- Blue: Roman Roads of Uncertain Course
Plate 1. Trench 4, looking east Gully 3, scale: 0.5m.

Plate 2. Trench 3, looking north, scales: 2m and 1m.