Lower Farm Quarry,
Newbury, West Berkshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For Tarmac Southern Ltd

by Sean Wallis
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code LFN05/85

October 2005
Summary

Site name: Lower Farm Quarry, Newbury, West Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 5070 6580

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 17th – 19th August 2005

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Sean Wallis

Site code: LFN05/85

Area of site: c. 0.28ha

Summary of results: Four linear features, one with a terminal were revealed and sampled. The features were not well dated. One feature produced a few small sherds of probable Iron Age pottery and a second, a fragment of brick/tile. It is considered that these features represent Iron Age or Roman activity in the area.

Monuments identified: Ditches

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

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford 14.10.05
Steve Preston 14.10.05
Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at Lower Farm Quarry, Newbury, Berkshire (SU5070 6580) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Wayne Dumelow, Site Manager for Tarmac Southern Limited, Lower Farm Quarry, Hambridge Lane, Newbury, Berkshire, RG14 5SS.

Planning permission (127017) had been gained from the then Berkshire County Council to extract gravel from a c. 47ha parcel of land on the south side of the River Kennet, to the south of Lower Farm, Hambridge Lane, Newbury, Berkshire. The consent was gained with a condition which required a programme of archaeological works to excavate and record archaeological deposits prior to extraction or other damage.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment’s Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the Council’s policies on archaeology. The current field investigation covered a small area within the quarry of approximately 0.28ha, and was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Duncan Coe, Principal Archaeological Officer of West Berkshire Heritage Service. The fieldwork was undertaken by Pamela Jenkins, Jo Pine and Sean Wallis, between 17th and 19th August 2005, and the site code is LFN05/85.

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

Location, topography and geology

The site is located about 3km east of the centre of Newbury, and approximately 1.5km south of Thatcham. The course of the River Kennet is immediately north and east of the current site. To the south, the ground rises steeply into woodland, beyond the boundary of the quarry, towards the site of the former airfield at Greenham Common, about 1km away. It was quite difficult to ascertain the original topography of the site as the area had previously been used to store gravel extracted from elsewhere, and there was a silt pond immediately to the north of the site. It did appear, however, that the original ground surface sloped gently down north-westwards towards the River Kennet. According to the British Geographical Survey, the underlying geology is alluvium above
gravel with the Reading Beds located just to the south (BGS 1947). The geology observed on site was variable with western areas located on clay of the Reading Beds with eastern areas on colluvial and/or alluvial deposits.

**Archaeological background**

The floor of the Kennet Valley between Thatcham and Hungerford is nationally noteworthy for the presence of Mesolithic sites (Froom 1971) and other periods are well represented. The archaeology of the area has been well summarized (Lobb and Rose 1996), and the archaeological potential of the whole proposal site has been demonstrated by a small scale field evaluation, comprising machine dug trenches. This revealed several areas of archaeological deposits, some of which were visible as cropmarks on aerial photographs (Farwell and Lobb 1987). A Bronze Age ring ditch was located to the west, and subsequently excavated (Heaton and Smith 1990). To the east, just to the north of the current site, the evaluation located ditches and pits of Roman date along with prehistoric struck flints and medieval pottery. The moderate quantities of Roman pottery recovered spanned the whole of that period, and may suggest the presence of an occupation site nearby. None of the evaluation trenches were dug in, or close to, the current proposal site.

**Objectives and methodology**

The general objectives of the watching brief were to:

- Excavate and record all archaeological deposits and features within the area threatened by the extraction or accompanying works.
- Produce relative and absolute dating and phasing for deposits and features recorded on the site.
- Establish the character of these deposits in an attempt to define functional areas on the site such as industrial, domestic, etc.
- Produce information on the economy and local environment and compare and contrast this with the results from other excavations in the region.

The specific research objectives of the project were to:

- Ascertain the nature and date of any landscape features encountered (e.g. fields, boundary features, large enclosures), along with their spatial organization.
- Establish whether the site was occupied, and if so, when did this commence and when was the site abandoned?
- Provide information about the palaeoenvironmental setting of the area.
The purpose of the watching brief was to monitor the stripping of a small parcel of land, which would subsequently become an extension of an existing silt pond. Topsoil and any subsoil were to be removed using a 360° type mechanical excavator, fitted with a toothless bucket, under constant archaeological supervision. All spoilheaps were to be monitored for finds.

After consultation with Mr Wayne Dumelow, the quarry manager, it was agreed that the proposal area should be stripped to the appropriate archaeological level, and that further groundworks would be delayed until any relevant deposits and features had been recorded. This prevented machines tracking over stripped areas until the necessary fieldwork had been completed.

**Results**

Topsoil and subsoil were removed from an area measuring approximately 43m by 13m (Fig. 3). The topsoil varied in thickness between 0.3m and 0.4m and consisted of dark brown/grey clayey silt (50). It was quite compacted as the area had previously been used as a gravel storage site. The orange brown silty clay subsoil (51) varied in thickness between 0.2m and 0.4m and was generally thicker towards the eastern, lower, end of the stripped area. A layer of apparent alluvium was encountered beneath the subsoil and a test pit was dug to see whether in fact this had sealed potential archaeological deposits. It was clear from the test pit that this was not an alluvial layer but was part of the Reading Beds.

From the test pit eastwards, a layer of dark greyish brown clayey silt was observed, varying in thickness between 0.1m and 0.3m (61). This deposit appeared to be quite humic in nature, and is interpreted as representing a flood deposit. All the archaeological features subsequently recorded were cut through this deposit, and at its highest, western, edge it was seen to be sealed by a further layer of clayey silt colluvium or hillwash deposit. It is likely therefore that this deposit (61) is old, and certainly it predates the feature digging activity in the stripped area.

A number of gullies or small ditches were recorded in the eastern part of the site (Fig. 3). Two slots (1 and 2) were excavated through ditch 1000, which varied in width between 0.6m and 0.93m, and was aligned approximately N-S (Fig. 4). The feature seemed to be generally wider and deeper towards its northern end, with the depth varying between 0.23m and 0.3m. The fills of each slot also varied, with the southern slot containing a single fill of orange grey silty clay, whilst the northern slot had a primary fill of light grey sandy clay and an upper fill of orange brown sandy clay. Fragments of burnt flint were recovered from all these fills, but there were no other finds. Gully 1001 was about 0.5m wide and aligned approximately NE-SW. It was visible on the
stripped surface for about 3.4m before it cut ditch 1000 (Fig. 4), with both disappearing into the northern baulk of the site. The terminal of the gully was excavated to reveal a single fill of brown/orange sandy clay, up to 0.14m thick, which contained burnt flint and four small sherds of probable Iron Age pottery. A slot dug to investigate the relationship between features 1000 and 1001, showed that gully 1001 was later than ditch 1000.

Two slots (5, 6) were dug through ditch 1002, which was aligned approximately N-S. This feature was about 0.85m wide and 0.3m deep, and ran across the entire width of the stripped area. It was filled with a brown/grey clayey silt which contained burnt flint along with a small piece of brick or tile. The southern slot (6) through 1002 appeared to have a primary fill of yellow/grey silty clay, which also produced finds of burnt flint.

Gully 1003 was aligned approximately parallel to ditch 1002. The two slots dug through it (7, 8) were quite different in character, as the feature was wider and deeper towards the north end of the site. The southern slot was 0.5m wide and 0.25m deep, filled with orange/grey clayey silt. The northern slot was 0.9m wide and 0.57m deep, and appeared to have a thin primary fill of grey clayey silt with moderate gravel inclusions, which produced no finds. The upper fill consisted of mid orange grey clayey silt, similar to that found in the southern slot. The only finds from this feature were fragments of burnt flint.

**Finds**

*The Iron Age Pottery* by Frances Raymond

Four heavily abraded sherds of pottery (4g) were recovered from gully 1001 (slot 3). All are featureless wall fragments made from one of two sandy fabrics. The ware used for two sherds (2g) is filled with abundant very fine to coarse rounded grains of quartz sand (0.12 to 1.0mm) and also contains rare well rounded calcareous inclusions (up to 2.0mm). The second fabric is characterized by abundant silt-sized to very fine angular quartz sand (<0.06 to 0.12mm), sparse organic inclusions (up to 5.0mm in length) and rare mica (<0.06mm).

All of the sherds are soft with oxidized surfaces and un-oxidized cores, consistent with low temperature firing under ‘open’ conditions. These and the other fabric characteristics point to a probable Iron Age date, although an early to mid Saxon origin is equally possible. Unfortunately the material is too fragmented and the assemblage too small to allow for a resolution of this uncertainty.

*Brick and Tile*

One small piece of brick or tile, weighing 4g, was found in ditch 1002 (6). This may be Roman in date, although it is possible that it is post-medieval.
**Burnt Clay**

One small fragment of burnt clay, weighing 6g, was recovered from ditch 1002 (5). It has no distinguishing characteristics.

**Burnt Flint**

A total of 176 pieces of unworked burnt flint, weighing 1664g, were recovered from the site (Appendix 2).

**Sampling for charred plant remains by Lucy Cramp**

Five samples of sediment were taken for environmental analysis and finds recovery. Four features were sampled (1, 3, 5, 8) along with one sample from the underlying layer of colluvium (61). Samples totalling 95 litres in volume, were floated over a 0.25mm mesh for the recovery of any preserved plant material. No such material was present.

**Conclusion**

The watching brief has recorded a small number of archaeological deposits comprising linear features. These probably representing field boundaries or paddocks and their similar alignment suggests a degree of contemporaneity. They are not necessarily located close to an occupied area. The recovery of dating evidence was limited with a small amount of pottery of probable Iron Age date recovered from just one feature, with a fragment of brick or tile from a second. The small size and number of these datable artefacts causes some doubt as to their significance as they could equally be residual or intrusive finds. The probable Iron Age pottery, even, may be of Saxon date. However, it seems unlikely that these features are of post-medieval date and their character, coupled with their consistent association with burnt flint, is more likely to reflect an Iron Age or Roman date, than later.

The observations reported here contribute a further small amount of information to add to that recovered from the previous evaluation for Iron Age and Roman land use of this part of the Kennet Valley.

**References**

Farwell, C and Lobb, S J 1987, ‘Lower Farm, Greenham, Archaeological Evaluation’, Wessex Archaeology, Salisbury
## APPENDIX 1: Feature details

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Lower Farm Quarry, Newbury, Berkshire, 2005
Archaeological Watching Brief

Figure 1. Location of site within Newbury and Berkshire.

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Lower Farm Quarry, Newbury, Berkshire, 2005

Figure 2: Plan showing features recorded and investigated. LFN 05/85
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Figure 3: Plan showing features recorded and investigated. LFN 05/85
Lower Farm Quarry, Newbury, Berkshire, 2005

Figure 4. Sections