Laleham to Stanwell Moor 132kV cable laying, Shortwood Common, Staines, Surrey

An Archaeological Watching Brief

for Southern Electric Power plc

by Simon Cass
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code LSM 04/09

May 2004
Summary

Site name: Laleham to Stanwell Moor 132kV cable laying, Shortwood Common, Staines, Surrey

Grid reference: TQ 0450 7194 to TQ 0497 7156

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 12th April–25th May 2004

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Simon Cass

Site code: LSM 04/09

Area of site: -

Summary of results: Victorian ? dumping events - no archaeologically relevant finds or features present.

Monuments identified: none

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

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Steve Preston✓ 28.05.04
Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at Shortwood Common, Staines, Surrey (TQ 0450 7194 to TQ 0497 7156) (Figs 1 and 2). The work was commissioned by Ms Jenny Emmett of Wardell Armstrong, 22 Windsor Place, Cardiff, CF10 3BY on behalf of Southern Electric Power Distribution plc.

The development entails excavation of two parallel trenches, 1.3m deep and 0.9m wide, between Laleham and Staines electricity substations to lay a 132kV cable and then to Stanwell Moor substation to lay a 33kV cable. The route of the trenches has been chosen to minimize the potential disruption to archaeological or environmentally sensitive areas by following existing roads and previously disturbed ground as far as possible. However, one stretch lies in open country across Shortwood Common and it was along this section that the watching brief took place.

The scheme of archaeological monitoring is in line with government guidance on archaeology and development, as set out in Archaeology and Planning (PPG 16, 1990), and with section 9 of the Electricity Act 1989 which obliges companies to: ‘have regard to the desirability of… protecting sites, buildings (including structures) and objects of architectural, historic or archaeological interest’.

The fieldwork was undertaken by Steve Hammond, Simon Cass, Richard Oram and Pamela Jenkins between 12th April and 25th May 2004 and the site code is LSM 04/09.

The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, 47–49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading RG1 5NR, and will be deposited at Staines Museum in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The stretch of the cable route monitored is located to the east of Staines (centred approximately NGR TQ 0475 7175), amongst modern development to the south of the King George VI and Staines Reservoirs (Fig. 1). The development bordering the site is primarily residential, with three sides defined by the A30(T), the A308 and a railway line. South of the railway line is an area of allotments. The site itself is an area of unimproved grassland currently under grazing (Shortwood Common), with informal footpaths, and also has a pond in the north. A
mature hedgerow crosses the site, on an approximate north-west to south-east alignment. The underlying geology of the site is characterized as Quaternary brickearth overlying Thames river deposits (BGS 1981) typically a stoneless loam, possibly old alluvium derived from the London Clay. The lowest deposit visible during the excavation of the trenches was a sandy gravel with occasional clay lenses.

**Archaeological background**

The site lies within the archaeologically rich Thames Valley, with a wide range of sites and finds recorded from the air (Longley 1976), dredged from the river (e.g., Chappell 1987) or from development-sponsored surveys. According to the Surrey Sites and Monuments Record, there are two main areas of archaeological potential near the route of the cable trenches. These reflect the environs of a barrow immediately to the north of the King George VI Reservoir, and Shortwood Common itself, due to the presence of a Roman Road under the current line of the A30(T) from London to Staines (Margary 1973). The area of the barrow site had been previously damaged by gravel extraction, and the route of the cable trenches was chosen to avoid it. The possibility of Roman deposits within the bounds of the Common is supported by chance artefact finds in the area in addition to the road and the apparent absence of any modern or post medieval disturbance/structural events. A number of cropmarks are visible from the air at the eastern end of the common, representing ditched field boundaries of unknown date (Longley 1976, fig. 4).

**Objectives and methodology**

The purpose of the watching brief was to identify any archaeological remains exposed by the works; to ensure that suitable measures were taken for the preservation or recording of any such remains, and to provide information on the likely nature and condition of archaeological evidence in the area, for the reference of future development or research projects. Topsoil stripping and trench excavation along the route were under archaeological supervision and the ground was inspected for archaeological remains. Spoilheaps were monitored for any archaeologically relevant finds.

**Results**

The brief entailed the observation of two parallel pipe trenches running through the Common, both 0.9m wide and approximately 1.3m deep. The trench centres were about 5m apart (Fig. 2). An area at the northern end of
the site approximately 20m x 5m in extent was also dug as a collecting point to enable a single under-road crossing to be made.

The stratigraphy of the northern third of both trenches seemed to suggest significant late post-medieval dumping and/or brickearth removal. The likely dumping deposits consisted of a dark brown-orange silty soil with a large quantity of glass, metal and stoneware pottery. The more southerly section of the trenches seemed to be undisturbed with an apparently intact subsoil (red-yellow sandy silt ‘brickearth’) still present. The stratigraphic sequence was broadly similar for the whole length of the trenches observed, consisting of approximately 0.2m of topsoil/turf overlying 0.2–0.5m of either subsoil or dumping deposits, which in turn overlay orange-grey sandy gravels with clay lenses down to the final depth of the trenches.

Finds

No archaeological finds were encountered. Modern finds, such as window glass or slate which enabled dating of the made ground, were not retained.

Conclusion

Despite the digging and observation of a continuous trenches of more than 600m length, no archaeological deposits were revealed. This watching brief indicates that although there is no record of any medieval or post-medieval structures along the route of the trenches, the north-western corner of Shortwood Common has been severely disturbed: finds or deposits relating to the Roman road or other periods are unlikely to survive without some truncation in this area. This activity seems to have avoided the southern part of the Common there was no indication of subsurface archaeological activity in this area.

References

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Figure 1. Location of site within Staines and Surrey.

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Figure 2. Detailed location of site on Shortwood Common.