Land at Spital Farm, Banbury, Oxfordshire

An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment

for Kennet Properties

by Steve Ford
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code SFB04-60

June 2004
Summary

**Site name:** Land at Spital Farm, Banbury, Oxfordshire

**Grid reference:** SP 474 404

**Site activity:** Desk-based assessment

**Project manager:** Steve Ford

**Site supervisor:** Steve Ford

**Site code:** SFB04/60

**Area of site:** c. 20ha

**Summary of results:** The site, on account of its size, can be considered to have moderate archaeological potential. Aerial photographs suggest a possible enclosure may be present.

**Monuments identified:** Ridge and furrow; possible D-shaped enclosure

This report may be copied for bona fide research or planning purposes without the explicit permission of the copyright holder

Report edited/checked by: Steve Preston 05.07.04
Introduction

This desk-based study is an assessment of the archaeological potential of a parcel of land located at Spital Farm, Banbury, Oxfordshire (SP474 404) (Fig. 1). The project was commissioned by Mr Brett Harbutt, of Kennet Properties, Clearwater Court, Vastern Road, Reading, RG1 8DB. and comprises the first stage of a process to determine the presence/absence, extent, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains which may be affected by redevelopment of the area.

Site description, location and geology

A site visit on the 30th June 2004 revealed that the site comprises an elongated area approximately 1km long and 200m wide. It wholly comprises abandoned farmland occupied by uncut grassland and overgrown with scrub. The northern boundary is formed by Overthorpe Road (Fig. 2). The western boundary is formed by an industrial estate and sewage works, the southern boundary by unused land and the eastern boundary by a concrete access road which is partly parallel with the M40. On this eastern side the site boundary diverges slightly from the M40 and follows the current county boundary. Various internal field boundaries are present, some hedged with hawthorn. A footpath crosses the site from south-east to north-west. The development area is centred on NGR, SP 4740 4040, and the underlying geology is Lower Lias (BGS 1982). It is at a height of approximately 90m above Ordnance Datum.

Planning background and development proposals

Planning permission is to be sought for the development of the site for industrial use. The site has already been allocated for such purposes in the revised Cherwell Local Plan Deposit Draft (CDC 2002).

Archaeology and Planning (PPG 16 1990) provides guidance relating to archaeology within the planning process. It points out that where a desk-based assessment has shown that there is a strong possibility of significant archaeological deposits in a development area it is reasonable to provide more detailed information from a field evaluation so that an appropriate strategy to mitigate the effects of development on archaeology can be devised:
Paragraph 21 states:

‘Where early discussions with local planning authorities or the developer’s own research indicate that important archaeological remains may exist, it is reasonable for the planning authority to request the prospective developer to arrange for an archaeological field evaluation to be carried out...’

Should the presence of archaeological deposits be confirmed further guidance is provided. *Archaeology and Planning* stresses preservation *in situ* of archaeological deposits as a first consideration as in paragraphs 8 and 18.

Paragraph 8 states:

‘...Where nationally important archaeological remains, whether scheduled or not, and their settings, are affected by proposed development there should be a presumption in favour of their physical preservation...’

Paragraph 18 states:

‘The desirability of preserving an ancient monument and its setting is a material consideration in determining planning applications whether that monument is scheduled or unscheduled...’

However, for archaeological deposits that are not of such significance it is appropriate for them to be ‘preserved by record’ (i.e., fully excavated and recorded by a competent archaeological contractor) prior to their destruction or damage.

Paragraph 25 states:

‘Where planning authorities decide that the physical preservation *in situ* of archaeological remains is not justified in the circumstances of the development and that development resulting in the destruction of the archaeological remains should proceed, it would be entirely reasonable for the planning authority to satisfy itself ... that the developer has made appropriate and satisfactory provision for the excavation and recording of remains.’

Further guidance is provided by Cherwell Local Plan 2011 Revised Deposit Draft (CLP 2002).

Policy EN47 states:

‘The council will promote sustainability of the historic environment through conservation, protection and enhancement of the archaeological heritage and its interpretation and presentation to the public. In particular it will:

i) seek to ensure that Scheduled Ancient Monuments or other unscheduled sites of national and regional importance and their settings are permanently preserved.

ii) ensure that development which could adversely affect sites, structures, landscapes and buildings of archaeological interest and their settings will require an assessment of the archaeological resource through a desktop study and, where appropriate, a field evaluation.

iii) not permit development that would adversely affect archaeological remains and their settings unless the applicant can demonstrate that the archaeological resource will be physically preserved *in situ* or a suitable strategy has been put forward to mitigate the impact of the development proposals.

iv) ensure that where physical preservation *in situ* is neither practical nor desirable and sites are not scheduled, or of national importance, the developer will be responsible for making appropriate provision for a programme of archaeological investigation, recording, analysis and publication that will ensure the site is preserved by record prior to destruction, such measures will be secured either by a planning agreement or by a suitable planning condition.'
**Methodology**

The assessment of the site was carried out by the examination of pre-existing information from a number of sources recommended by the Institute of Field Archaeologists paper ‘Standards in British Archaeology’ covering desk-based studies. These sources include historic and modern maps, the Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record, geological maps and any relevant publications or reports.

**Archaeological background**

*General background*

From an Oxfordshire perspective, the site lies well away from the chalk, gravel or limestone outcrops that not only were well settled throughout much of prehistoric and historic times but are also conducive to site discovery from aerial photography or during mineral extraction. The last published overview of the county with distribution maps (Briggs 1986) indicates relatively few find spots for the environs of Banbury and the site, although more recent fieldwork has begun to redress this distribution (Henig and Booth 2000). Most of the known archaeology for the area is skewed towards the medieval period with Banbury being an important town.

*Prehistoric and Roman*

A few finds of Neolithic flint arrowheads and axeheads are recorded for the Cherwell Valley as are a few Bronze Age bronze tools and weapons. Similarly several Iron Age coins and other finds are recorded, along with cropmark evidence for occupation sites. There are few Roman sites in the area but with rather more recorded findspots.

*Saxon and Medieval*

In later Saxon and medieval times, Banbury, has a minister and develops into a town which dominates the record. Various finds of coins and other objects are recorded and some Saxon deposits are present within the study area here (Fig. 1, 4). In medieval times Banbury has Borough status with a market and fair and St Leonards Hospital was sited on the outskirts of the town.

*Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record*

The Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) was consulted on 25th June 2004. Just eight entries are contained within a search radius of 500m from the site. These are listed in Appendix 1 and their positions plotted
A limited date range is represented, with no entries for prehistoric or Roman times. The earliest entry is for a Saxon field system at Jugglers Close to the north-west of the site [Fig. 1: 4].

The site of St Leonard’s Leper Hospital, on or close to the site of Spital Farm is of medieval date [8]. The hospital is described in the historic documents as standing at the ‘east end of Banbury bridge’ (VCH 1907, 154). Land was donated to the ‘master and leprous brothers of St Leonard, Banbury’ in the reign of Edward I and again in 1336. It is not clear if the hospital stood literally by the bridge, though it seems more likely it lies at the site of Spital Farm near to the west of the proposal site.

The site itself was partially occupied by medieval ridge and furrow (Fig. 9) presumably as a part of the fields of Warkworth, Northamptonshire.

Four entries are for post-medieval remains. Two reflect the presence of two toll houses [1, 2], one for a milestone [3] and the other for the site of a brickworks [4].

Finally, two entries are for the results of archaeological investigations. One was for an evaluation on land immediately to the west of the proposal site [6], and the other for a watching brief in the environs of Spital Farm to the south-west [7]. Both of these were negative.

**Cartographic and documentary sources**

A range of Ordnance Survey and other historical maps of the area were consulted at The Centre for Oxfordshire Studies and The Centre for Banburyshire Studies (Banbury Library) in order to ascertain what activity had been taking place throughout the site’s later history and whether this may have affected any possible archaeological deposits within the proposal area (see Appendix 2).

The earliest map available of the area is Christopher Saxton’s map of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire in 1574 (Fig. 3). This map is reproduced at a small scale and depicts features schematically. The area occupied by the site can only be located approximately.

The next map by G Bryant in 1827 is of Northamptonshire as the site lay within this county until late in the 19th century (Fig. 4). The river Cherwell to the west formed the county boundary. The site can be approximately located relative to Overthorpe Road but otherwise lies within an area devoid of features.

The Ordnance Survey First Edition (1882) shows the site much as it is now (Fig. 5). Apart from the lack of a boundary on the south-west portion of the site the main field boundaries and a footpath are all in place.

By 1900, the Ordnance Survey second edition map now shows a complete western site boundary with the northern field subdivided (Fig. 6). At this time the site has become an ‘Irrigation Farm’ (sewage farm) for
Banbury Corporation Sewage Works though no facilities are shown. The site has now been incorporated within Oxfordshire. The maps of 1938 (Fig. 7) and 1955 (Fig. 8) show no change and, apart from the loss of one field boundary, the site is the same as the present day.

Listed buildings

There are no buildings, listed or otherwise on the site.

Registered Parks and Gardens; Registered Battlefields

There are no registered parks, gardens or battlefields present on the site.

Aerial Photographs

The aerial photographic collections of Cambridge University and the National Monuments Record (English Heritage) were consulted for a 500m radius of the site area. The Cambridge collection had no photographs of the site. The National Monuments Record collection had 71 vertical photographs (58 available for inspection) from 22 sorties. It also had 33 oblique photographs from 9 sorties.

Several of the photographs revealed deposits of archaeological interest, most of which were ridge and furrow field systems of medieval date. Figure 9 indicates this ridge and furrow as it was in 1947 for the southern portion of the site. Although traces of this ridge and furrow might still be extant, subsequent agricultural practice has largely levelled these features.

The same photograph also shows what appears to be a D-shaped enclosure in the northern portion of the site (Fig. 9). The photograph is not particularly clear, and the feature appears to be present within a grassland area. As such the identification of this feature as of archaeological interest is not clear cut, but is sufficient to warrant consideration for further investigation to confirm or refute its significance.

Discussion

In considering the archaeological potential of the study area, various factors must be taken into account, including previously recorded archaeological sites, previous land-use and disturbance, future land-use including the proposed development and the size of the development land take.

This study has noted that very few finds and deposits of archaeological interest are previously recorded for the environs of the site. Spital Farm itself, the site of a medieval leper hospital, lies several hundred metres from
the nearest boundary of the site and any associated deposits, such as a cemetery, are most unlikely to extend as far as the site. Evaluation fieldwork prior to the development of the industrial estate just to the west of the proposal site also failed to locate any deposits of archaeological interest.

The site was covered partially and probably wholly by ridge and furrow, which is part of a medieval field system. Some of this may still be extant but denuded by recent cultivation (but which could not be confirmed by the site visit due to the excessive vegetation cover). In itself, as a levelled fragment of a much more extensive pattern, it is of minor archaeological relevance (Hall 1993) and its existence on aerial photographs is probably a sufficient record as to its former presence and location.

A search of aerial photographic collections did reveal a small area possibly containing deposits of archaeological interest. A ‘D-shaped’ crop- or parch-mark towards the north of the site has the appearance of being a small enclosure which might reflect the presence of a stockpen or occupation site. There is some doubt about this interpretation, but evaluation trenching would be easily able to confirm or refute its potential.

The size of the site at c. 20ha is sufficient that the chance of encountering archaeological sites at random is increased. The density of archaeological sites across the landscape varies from region to region, and with reference to geology, topography and date. Published statistics such as those from Bedfordshire suggest densities of Roman sites alone of one site every 50ha (Simco 1984) and intensive fieldwork in other regions suggest the presence of an archaeological site of some type every 12ha (Ford 1997). Figures as high as one site every 8ha occur in Wiltshire (D. Coe pers. comm.). As such, on the basis of site size alone, there is a moderate possibility of archaeological deposits being present.

It may be necessary to provide further information about the potential of the site from field observations in order to draw up a scheme to mitigate the impact of development on any below-ground archaeological deposits if necessary. A scheme for this evaluation should be carried out by a competent archaeological contractor according to a written scheme of investigation approved by the archaeological adviser to the Local Planning Authority. The information provided by the fieldwork can be used to draw up a mitigation strategy to minimize the effects of development on any archaeological deposits present.

References
Blair, J, 1998, Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire (2nd edn), Stroud
Hall, D, 1993, The open fields of Northamptonshire, the case for the preservation of ridge and furrow, Northamptonshire Heritage, Northampton
Henig, M and Booth, P, 2000, Roman Oxfordshire, Stroud
Archaeological Unit, Oxford
Simco, A, 1984, Survey of Bedfordshire, The Roman Period, RCHME/ Bedfordshire County Council
APPENDIX 1: Sites and Monuments Records within a 500 m search radius of the development site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>SMR Ref</th>
<th>Grid Ref (SP)</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>11266</td>
<td>4663 4111</td>
<td>Toll House</td>
<td>Post-medieval</td>
<td>Site of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>10312</td>
<td>4652 4106</td>
<td>Toll House</td>
<td>Post-medieval</td>
<td>Site of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10082</td>
<td>4773 4155</td>
<td>Milestone</td>
<td>Post-medieval</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>16715</td>
<td>4653 4175</td>
<td>Field system</td>
<td>Saxon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>464 407</td>
<td>Brickworks</td>
<td>Post-medieval</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>471 407</td>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Negative results, OAU 1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4680 4040</td>
<td>Watching Brief</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Negative results, Thorpe Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1794</td>
<td>4690 4030</td>
<td>Leper Hospital</td>
<td>Medieval</td>
<td>Site of St Leonards Hospital at Spital Farm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 2: Historic and modern maps consulted

1574  Christopher Saxton, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire (Fig. 3)
1827  A. Bryant, Northamptonshire (Fig. 4)
1882  Ordnance Survey, first edition 25”, Northants sheet LVIIISW (Fig. 5)
1900  Ordnance Survey, second edition 25”, Oxfordshire sheet VI.9
1900  Ordnance Survey, second edition 6”, Oxfordshire sheet VI.9 (Fig. 6)
1938  Ordnance Survey, revised edition 6”, Oxfordshire sheet VI.SW (Fig. 7)
1955  Ordnance Survey, 6”, SP44SE (Fig. 8)
Spital Farm, Banbury, Oxfordshire, 2004
An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment

Figure 1. Location of site within Banbury and Oxfordshire showing SMR information.

Reproduced from Ordnance Survey Explorer 191
Ordnance Survey Licence 100025880 at 1:12500
Figure 2. Detailed location of site.

Not to scale
Ordnance Survey Licence 100025880
Figure 3. Christopher Saxton’s Map of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire 1574.
Figure 4. Bryants map of Northamptonshire 1827.
Spital Farm, Banbury, Oxfordshire, 2004
An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment

Figure 5. Ordnance Survey First Edition 1882
Figure 6. Ordnance Survey Second Edition 1900.
Spital Farm, Banbury, Oxfordshire, 2004
An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment

Figure 7. Ordnance Survey 1938 Edition.
Spital Farm, Banbury, Oxfordshire, 2004
An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment

Figure 8. Ordnance Survey 1955 Edition.
Spital Farm, Banbury, Oxfordshire, 2004
An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment

Figure 9. Aerial photograph of site taken in January 1947