21A HIGHFIELD ROAD, SALISBURY

Archaeological Evaluation

Prepared on behalf of:
RFS Country Home Builders
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Summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Wessex Archaeology in connection with a planning application to redevelop land at 21A Highfield Road, Salisbury for residential purposes. The site was thought to lie partially within an Iron Age settlement which had been recognised and investigated in the 19th century.

A single machine-excavated trench along the main axis of the proposed development site located the main enclosure ditch towards the southern end of the site. The 'V'-shaped ditch, which had silted naturally, measured 4.40m across and was approximately 1.90m deep. Large quantities of domestic refuse were found in the upper fills. The Middle Iron Age date of the enclosure ditch was confirmed.

The ditch had been recut on a slightly different alignment, with steep sides and a flat base. This could have occurred during the Romano-British period

A small number of contemporary features were also identified within the enclosure, probably as a result of settlement in this area. Only one feature, a small gully, lay outside the enclosure.

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The project was managed for Wessex Archaeology by Mick Rawlings. The fieldwork was directed by Phil Harding and Nick Cooke, assisted by Jon Crisp and Hayley Clark. This report was prepared by Phil Harding with comments on the finds by Lorraine Mepham. Elizabeth James prepared the illustrations.

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Archaeological Evaluation

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by RFS Country Home Builders to undertake an archaeological evaluation of land at 21A Highfield Road, Salisbury (Fig. 1). The work was required with regard to a proposed residential development of the site.

1.1.2 The archaeological evaluation was requested by the Wiltshire County Archaeology Service (the CAS), acting as archaeological advisors to Salisbury District Council. This request was in line with national planning guidance for archaeology and development (*Planning Policy Guidance 16: Archaeology and Planning* – DoE 1990) and with County and District structure plan policies.

1.1.3 A Project Design (Ref. T5027.1) was drawn up by Wessex Archaeology setting out the methodology which would be employed in order to meet the aims of the evaluation. The format and content of the Project Design followed guidance given in the document *Management of Archaeological Projects* (English Heritage 1991) and in the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations* (1994).

1.2 The Site

1.2.1 The site, centred on NGR SU 1334 3074, is located on Highfield Road in the north-western part of the Salisbury. It lies towards the crest of a south-easterly projecting spur at approximately 65m aOD. The land slopes steeply down into the valley of the River Avon to the north and into the valley of the River Nadder to the south. The underlying drift geology is mapped as river gravels capping Upper Chalk (British Geological Survey, 1:50,000 Solid and Drift, Sheet 298).

1.2.2 Prior to demolition, the site was occupied by a 19th century outbuilding which had been used more recently as a garage/workshop. It was known that a vehicle inspection pit had been dug through the flooring of this building. The surrounding area comprised predominantly 19th century housing.

1.3 Archaeological Background

1.3.1 The proposed development is located on the south-eastern side of an Iron Age settlement of approximately 6.5 hectares which was enclosed by a ‘V’-shaped ditch. The site was identified and investigated in 1869 although the results were not published until 1934 (Stevens 1934).

1.3.2 These earlier excavations traced the extent of the enclosure ditch (Fig. 1) and showed that it contained a lower gravelly primary fill which was overlain by deposits containing large quantities of domestic refuse and burnt flint. A number of storage pits, which had been backfilled with domestic refuse, were also discovered with other settlement evidence both inside and outside the enclosure. The pottery suggested that occupation had commenced in the 5th century BC and possibly continued until the 3rd century AD.

1.3.3 No additional work has been undertaken at the Highfield enclosure since these initial discoveries.

1.4 Aims

1.4.1 The principal aim of the evaluation was to provide evidence for the presence/absence, date, nature and extent of any buried archaeological remains within the proposed development area. The results would provide information which could be used to formulate a detailed and guided archaeological mitigation policy in respect of the proposed development if this was necessary.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Fieldwork

2.1.1 The evaluation comprised a single machine-excavated trench, 28.70m long and 1.8m wide, aligned along the central axis of the development site (Fig. 1). The work, including fieldwork and reporting, was carried out in line with the document *Standards for Archaeological Assessment and Evaluation in Wiltshire* (1995).

2.1.2 The trial trench was excavated under constant archaeological supervision by a tracked mini-digger equipped with a toothless bucket. Recent made ground, demolition rubble, topsoil and a veneer of subsoil were removed in order to expose the underlying gravel deposits and the archaeological features.

2.1.3 All archaeological deposits and features were cleaned and excavated by hand. The trench was located in relation to the Ordnance Survey national grid, and all archaeological features tied into the Ordnance Survey Datum. Archaeological features and deposits were recorded using Wessex Archaeology's *pro forma* recording system. All features were examined to establish the date, nature, extent and condition of the archaeological remains.

2.1.4 The spoil from the trench was scanned for a representative sample of unstratified artefacts. Bulk environmental soil samples were taken from well-sealed, datable ditch deposits for plant macro-fossils, small animal bones and other small artefacts.

2.1.5 The trench was backfilled following completion of the fieldwork.

3 THE RESULTS

3.1 The Enclosure Ditch

3.1.1 The main enclosure ditch (**111**) was revealed at the south end of the trench and was aligned approximately north-east/south-west (Fig. 2). It measured 4.40m across at the surface and was cut with a 'V'-shaped profile. Excavation ceased at a depth of 1.30m below current ground level in order to comply with current Wessex Archaeology health and safety guidelines. The profile was extended through the upper part of the primary fill by auger, however the basal gravelly fill could not be penetrated to locate the base of the ditch. The depth of the ditch at this point is likely to have been approximately 1.90m.

3.1.2 The ditch was cut through the overlying river gravel deposits which were thinner to the east. The gravel averaged 0.30m thick and comprised unbedded, sub-angular, flint gravel in a stiff, brown, silty clay matrix. The contact surface with the underlying Upper Chalk was pocked with solution pipes and hollows. It is possible that this gravel is similar to the deposits which cap Milford Hill on the south-eastern side of the city. These deposits comprise chalky fluvial gravel which was originally bedded but which has undergone intense decalcification. This process combined with the effects of solution of the underlying chalk have resulted in deposits of unbedded gravel.

3.1.3 The basal deposits of the primary ditch fill were detected, but not penetrated, by auger. They were probably up to 0.60m thick and included flinty gravel arising from the surface geology.

3.1.4 The upper part (**104**; **119**; **123**) of the primary ditch fill was visible in the excavated section. It comprised light orange-grey tips of chalk pellets alternating with broader bands of silty clay near the edges of the ditch. Lenses of fine chalk rubble were more prevalent in the base of the weathering cone. The general absence of chalk rubble may be attributed to the fact that the natural bedrock is poorly-bedded, pastey material.

3.1.5 The primary ditch fills appear to have been derived from the western side of the ditch. This may have resulted from downslope movement of material, but it is more likely to reflect the presence of an internal bank.

3.1.6 The overlying fills were represented by two distinct deposits of dark grey-brown, silty clay which contained material including charcoal, pottery, animal bone and fired clay. They were most clearly defined on the western side of the ditch. The lower horizon (**116**) lay directly on the primary silts and contrasted with the overlying material (**114**; **121**) which also contained large quantities of burnt flint. A dark brown, relatively stone-free, silty clay stabilisation horizon (**112**) overlay these deposits. It included a lens of fired clay (**108**) which extended from the southern edge of the trench. The upper surface of this lens was heavily oxidised, suggesting that it had been burnt *in situ*. The ditch sequence was sealed by a dark brown silty clay (**113**) with

large quantities of redeposited gravel which was probably derived from the inner bank.

3.2 The Recut Ditch

3.2.1 Ditch **111** had been recut along its eastern edge by ditch **117**. This was sectioned at a point at which it was aligned slightly more north-south than ditch **111** (Fig. 2). The recut ditch was 1.60m across at the surface and 1.3m deep. It had steep, almost vertical, sides and a flat base.

3.2.2 The primary fill comprised a compact, dark grey-brown, silty clay (**118**) which was well-developed in the northern section. It was overlain by tips of dark grey-brown silty clay (**115**) with stones which had accumulated in the base of the weathering cone. This material included lenses of chalk on the eastern side derived from the primary fills of ditch **111** and dark grey tips on the western side which were redeposited from the secondary fills of the earlier ditch. The upper part of ditch **117** was occupied by a well-developed, dark brown, relatively stone-free turf line (**105**). This was sealed by unsorted dark grey gravelly material (**103**) which may represent a ploughsoil. The ditch hollow was finally backfilled with clay, chalk and flint which probably occurred when the bank was deliberately levelled.

3.3 Other Features

3.3.1 A broad band approximately 5m across extended west of the main enclosure ditch **111** to the highest part of the trench and contained no archaeological features. This area probably indicates the location of an internal bank. A number of features which were probably related to the occupation of the enclosure were also examined.

3.3.2 A shallow irregular gully (**124**) was located to the east of ditch **111**, i.e. outside the enclosure. It extended 1.30m north-west from the southern edge of the trench.

3.3.3 Features within the enclosure included an angled gully (**128**; **130**) which averaged 0.62m wide and was 0.11m deep with sloping sides and a rounded base.

3.3.4 Two shallow postholes (**132**) and (**134**) were located at the western end of the trench, of which the former may be of post-medieval date.

4. FINDS

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 A small quantity of finds was recovered from fills of the Iron Age enclosure ditch (**111**) and its recut (**117**), and from four other features. This material has been quantified by material type within each context (Table 1). Datable finds from enclosure ditch **111** indicate that it is of Middle Iron Age date. The recut contained a mixture of Middle Iron Age, Romano-British and post-medieval

material. Middle Iron Age pottery was also recovered from two small gullies (**124**; **128**).

4.2 Pottery

4.2.1 Most of the sherds are of Iron Age date (82 sherds), occurring mainly in sandy fabrics, with single examples of sherds in sandy/shelly and organic-tempered fabrics. A small proportion of these sherds are burnished, and two (joining) sherds are red-finished ('haematite-coated'). Diagnostic sherds are restricted to three rim sherds, from slack-shouldered or convex vessels.

4.2.2 The emphasis on sandy wares and the identifiable vessel forms place this group in the Middle Iron Age (*c.* 400-100 BC), although the red-finished sherds could represent an earlier (Early Iron Age) element within the assemblage. Within the excavated sequence of enclosure ditch fills, there is no discernible ceramic sequence within the Iron Age material.

4.2.3 Sherds also occurred residually within ditch recut **117**, and serve to date gullies **124** and **128** to the same period (Middle Iron Age). There was no evidence of on-site pottery manufacture in the form of 'wasters', as was noted during earlier investigations on the site (Stevens 1934, 597).

4.2.4 A further 17 sherds are of Romano-British date, all coarsewares, and including no closely datable sherds. These were recovered mainly from the topsoil, with a single sherd from the lowest excavated fill of ditch recut **117**.

4.3 Fired Clay

4.3.1 The small quantity of fired clay is almost certainly structural in origin; several pieces retain surfaces. This material, which derived mainly from the enclosure ditch and its recut, is likely to be of Iron Age date.

4.4 Worked Flint and Burnt Flint

4.4.1 The worked flint comprises 17 waste flakes, half of which were found in the topsoil. All pieces are in relatively fresh condition, but in the absence of diagnostic pieces this small group cannot be dated more closely within the prehistoric period.

4.4.2 Burnt, unworked flint was recovered in larger quantities, mainly from the enclosure ditch and its recut. This material is of uncertain date, although associated finds would suggest that it is Iron Age.

4.5 Metalwork

4.5.1 This includes both iron and copper alloy objects. The copper alloy comprises a stud (**103**), a dressmaking pin (**105**) and half of a bracelet-sized ring (topsoil), while the iron objects include a nail shank (**103**) and a piece of wire (**105**). With the exception of one iron object from posthole **132**, and a second iron object from the lowest excavated fill of the enclosure ditch, both unidentified, all the metal objects came either from the topsoil or from ditch recut **117** and are likely to be of post-medieval date.

4.6 Other Finds

4.6.1 Other finds comprise three fragments of ceramic building material, almost certainly of medieval or later date (ditch recut **117**); two fragments of modern glass (one unstratified, one from recut **117**; one piece of possibly utilised stone (enclosure ditch **111**); a fragment of a shale armlet, of uncertain date (recut **117**); a small quantity of ironworking slag (recut **117**, feature **132**); a small quantity of animal bone; and two oyster shells (recut **117**).

5. ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

5.1 Aims

5.1.1 Bulk samples were taken to assess the presence of charred plant remains and charcoal and indicate their palaeo-environmental significance. Although the enclosure ditch has been previously sectioned and reported upon (Stevens 1934), this current work provided the first opportunity to examine any environmental remains.

5.2 Samples Taken

5.2.1 A series of three bulk samples of 10 litres was processed. Two samples were taken from the secondary fills (**114**; **116**) of the main enclosure ditch, and one from a lens of fired clay (**108**) in the upper part of the ditch fill sequence.

5.3 Processing

5.3.1 The bulk samples were processed by standard flotation methods; the flot retained on a 0.5 mm mesh and the residues fractionated into 5.6 mm, 2 mm and 1 mm fractions and dried. The coarse fractions (>5.6 mm) were sorted, weighed and discarded.

5.3.2 The flots were scanned under a x10 - x30 stereo-binocular microscope and presence of charred remains quantified in order to present data to record the preservation and nature of the charred plant and charcoal remains.

5.4 Charred Plant Remains

5.4.1 The flots varied in size (average flot size for a 10 litre sample is 60 millilitres) with between 3 - 5 % rooty material and very high numbers of uncharred weed seeds, which may be indicative of stratigraphic movement.

5.4.2 High numbers of charred grain fragments, varying quantities of charred chaff fragments and low levels of charred weed seeds were observed in all three flots. Small mammal bones were recorded in two samples and molluscs in the other sample. This material has been retained within the site archive.

5.4.3 Although the charred plant remains are incidental to the feature (i.e. they have blown in) they indicate the general activities and crops utilised within the ditched enclosure. The charred remains have the potential to determine the crops grown, and provide some general information on the Iron Age crop economy. The charred weed seeds may also enable some indication of the location of the crops; i.e. on gravel, alluvial soils on the chalk. More

specifically the presence of weeds seeds and chaff may enable the interpretation and isolation of some of the process conducted on site.

5.5 Charcoal

5.5.1 Charcoal was noted from the flots of the bulk samples and fragments greater than 5.6mm were retrieved in high numbers from ditch fill **116**. The charcoal mainly comprised large wood fragments, and all of this material has been retained within the archive.

5.5.2 Again the charcoal is likely to have originated from domestic hearths or specific processes such as grain drying ovens, ovens or even furnaces. The range of species and type of wood (twigs, roundwood and heartwood) present may help discern whether this represented charcoals from general domestic or more specific activities. The range of species might provide information of the nature of the local woodland, and of any evidence of management such as coppicing or pollarding.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 The evaluation has provided the first opportunity to examine the Iron Age enclosure at Highfield Road since its initial excavation in the 1860s. The work has confirmed many of the observations made in the original records and the accuracy of the 19th century survey work.

6.2 The excavation showed that the settlement was enclosed by a 'V' shaped ditch which was approximately 1.90m deep. Stevens (1934, 595) recorded that it averaged 1.80m deep on the north side but reached 2.59m deep in the west.

6.3 The original records of the excavation showed that the primary ditch fill was approximately 1.37m deep and resembled 'the refuse of a gravel pit when coarse stone has been needed' (Stevens 1934, 595). The recent work at Highfield Road was unable to examine the basal material, however the auger survey confirmed that the primary fill included gravel which had weathered from the ditch sides.

6.4 The upper part of the section was described as 'containing much very small size stones and burnt stones' (Stevens 1934, 595) but does not apparently mention that it also included pottery, bone, charcoal and fired clay. It seems most likely that this deposit comprises large quantities of domestic refuse which were dumped into the ditch after the initial phases of silting had taken place. It may indicate that the ditch had ceased to play a significant part in defining the enclosure.

6.5 The Victorian excavators appear to have recognised that a period of stabilisation took place at the top of the ditch silts. They described 'a string of apparently washed very fine stone' (Stevens 1934, 596) which may represent a sorted horizon at the base of a soil. The ditch was finally levelled with black soil and burnt stone, much of which may have come from the inner bank.

6.6 The original excavators do not appear to have identified the recut ditch. The accuracy of their recording suggests that they would have noticed it had it been visible. It is particularly surprising in that the plan redrawn by Stevens (1934, fig 1) suggests that a trench was located only 12m west of the current evaluation trench. It is therefore uncertain how far the recut ditch extends.

6.7 The pottery suggests that the main enclosure ditch should be dated to the Middle Iron Age (*c*. 400-100 BC). Stevens (1934, 596) was of the opinion that the ditch did not form part of the original settlement but that it was added to an existing open settlement. The evaluation trench cannot confirm or deny this although it has been suggested above that sherds of red-finished pottery from the evaluation could indicate an Early Iron Age element within the ceramic assemblage.

6.8 The date of the recut ditch is more problematic. It was recut after the main enclosure ditch had silted and appears to date, on the evidence of a single sherd from the primary fill, to the Romano-British period. Most of the pottery from this feature is of Iron Age date. Elsewhere Romano-British pottery is restricted to unstratified contexts. Stevens noted that the original excavators were aware of the scarcity of Romano-British pottery from the features but noted that it did occur in topsoil contexts. They used this to argue that the site was of pre-Roman date.

6.9 The evaluation has demonstrated the presence within the application site of archaeological deposits of local significance. However, due to the small size of the site and the restricted potential impact of the proposed development, it is considered that the evaluation should represent the final part of the programme of archaeological mitigation.

7 THE ARCHIVE

7.1 The archive, comprising the written records, plans, section drawings, monochrome negatives and colour transparencies, along with the material retained following the processing of the environmental samples, is currently held with Wessex Archaeology at Portway House, Old Sarum Park under the project code number 47797. This will eventually be deposited, with the finds, with the Salisbury and South Wilts Museum at Salisbury.

8 REFERENCES

Stevens, F., 1934, 'The Highfield pit dwellings, Fisherton, Salisbury', *Wiltshire Archaeol. Natur. Hist. Mag.* 46, 579-624.

Table 1: All finds by context (number/weight in grammes; burnt flint and slag weight only)

Context	Description	Animal Bone	Burnt Flint	Fired Clay	Worked Flint	Prehist. pottery	R-B pottery	P-med pottery	Slag	Metal	Other Finds
102	linear 101		150								
103/110	ditch recut 117	1/2	468	1/18		10/110				1 Cu; 1 Fe	1 CBM (25g); 1 glass (1g); 1 shale frag (2g)
104	enclosure ditch 111	2/15				2/31			2		
105	ditch recut 117	8/21		1/5	1/15	1/15				1 Cu; 2 Fe	1 oyster shell
106	enclosure ditch 111					1/8					
108	enclosure ditch 111	3/7	50	9+/141	1/13	1/14					1 worked stone (36g)
110	ditch recut 117	1/2									
112	enclosure ditch 111					3/33					
113	enclosure ditch 111	4/14									
114	enclosure ditch 111	18/39	4773	4/54		10/124			3		
115	ditch recut 117	16/224	1132	3/103		25/494	1/8		225		2 CBM (5g); 1 oyster shell
116	enclosure ditch 111	16/60		4/250	7/16	16/278			421	3 Fe	
126	gully 124	2/7				1/17					
129	gully 128	2/8	23	1/21		7/47					
133	feature 132								31	1 Fe	
topsoil	unstratified				8/150	5/62	16/143	4/427		1 Cu	1 glass (2g)
TOTAL		**72/397**	**6842**	**23+/592**	**17/194**	**82/1233**	**17/151**	**4/427**	**682**	**3 Cu; 7 Fe**	**3 CBM; 2 glass; 1 shale; 2 shell; 1 stone**

Key:
Prehist = Prehistoric; R-B = Romano-British; P-med = Post-medieval; CBM = Ceramic Building Material; Fe = Iron; Cu = copper alloy

APPENDIX 1: RESULTS OF MACHINE TRENCHING

Archaeological features are highlighted in **bold**

TRENCH 1		
Length 28.70m	**Width** 1.80m	**OD height** 65.13 - 64.65

Context	Description	Thickness (m)
101	Linear feature, 1.44m wide. Later shown to be deliberate levelling of weathering cone in recut ditch **117**	0.24
102	Light yellow-brown silty clay with chalk and flint. Deliberate levelling of ditch **117** from bank	0.24
103	Unbedded dark grey silty clay with subangular flint gravel. Assumed ploughsoil colluvium in hollow of ditch **117** (=110).	0.26
104	Light orange-grey silty clay with tips of chalk pellets alternating with broader bands of silty clay. Primary fill of ditch **111**. Same as 119 and 123.	Not seen
105	Lens of generally stone-free dark brown silty clay. Turf line.	0.10
106	Lens of gravel in dark grey-brown silty clay in north section	0.05
107	Stone free dark grey-brown silty clay. Stabilisation horizon mainly seen in north section.	0.08
108	Lens of oxidised fired clay within 107 towards north section.	0.02
109	Dark grey-brown silty clay. Uppermost fill of ditch **111** as in north section.	0.09
110	Unbedded dark grey silty clay with subangular flint gravel. Assumed ploughsoil colluvium in hollow of ditch **117** (=103).	0.26
111	Cut of 'V'-shaped enclosure ditch. 4.40m wide.	*c.* 1.90
112	Relatively stone-free dark brown silty clay in ditch **111**.	0.09
113	Gravel in dark brown silty clay matrix. Seen in south section of **111**, possibly derived from bank.	0.10
114	Dark grey-brown silty clay containing much occupation debris and burnt flint on west side of ditch **111**.	0.15
115	Dark grey-brown silty clay lenses forming natural silting of ditch recut **117**.	0.54
116	Dark grey-brown silty clay with large quantities of domestic refuse directly overlying primary silts of ditch **111**.	0.30
117	Recut ditch along eastern edge of ditch **111**, 1.60m wide at surface. Very steep sides with flat base.	1.30
118	Compact dark grey-brown basal silty clay fill of recut **117**.	0.15
119	Light orange-grey silty clay with tips of chalk pellets alternating with broader bands of silty clay. Primary fill of ditch **111** on east side. Same as 104 and 123.	Not seen
120	Dark grey-brown silty clay surface ditch fill of ditch **111** in south section.	0.12
121	Flints in dark grey-brown silty clay matrix in eastern edge of south section of ditch **111**. Probable equal of 114 on western side.	0.10

122	Lens of stone-free silty clay in eastern corner of south section of ditch **111**.	0.10-0.20
123	Light orange-grey silty clay with tips of chalk pellets alternating with broader bands of silty clay. Primary fill of ditch **111** on western side. Same as 119 and 104.	Not seen
124	Lobed, slightly irregular gully, east of ditch **111**. Extends 1.30m from south edge of trench.	0.06
125	Dark grey-brown silty clay segment fill of gully **124**.	0.06
126	Dark grey-brown silty clay segment fill of gully **124**.	0.06
127	Dark grey-brown silty clay segment fill of gully **124**.	0.06
128	Cut of gully aligned north-west/south-east across trench 0.67m wide. Probably = gully **130**.	0.12
129	Dark grey-brown silty clay fill of gully **128**.	0.12
130	Cut of gully aligned north-east/south-west across trench, probably return of gully **128**.	0.10
131	Dark brown silty clay fill of gully **130**.	0.10
132	Sub rectangular feature, 0.85m x 0.43m, with sloping sides and flat base. Possible posthole.	0.08
133	Dark brown gravelly silty clay, possibly packing backfill of feature **132**.	0.08
134	Cut of circular posthole, 0.32 m in diameter with rounded base.	0.05
135	Dark grey-brown silty clay fill of post hole **134**.	0.05