

Appendix E - Archaeology

Environmental Appraisal
Volume II

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The Bronze Age - 2,300BC to 700BC

At Aldermaston Wharf, located in the tributary valley of the Kennet, were unenclosed clusters of round houses and pits, showing evidence for a mixed agricultural economy and craft activity such as textile production, but little metalwork or other wealth. Gravel working also uncovered a much larger Late Bronze Age settlement at Knight's Farm, Burghfield. This yielded evidence of occupation over a period of about 1,000 years up to c.400BC. (Bradley et al, 1980).

In the late 1980s development alongside the M4 resulted in the discovery of several more Bronze Age settlements on the site of Reading Business Park, to the south of the town. Here, the pattern suggested several groups of round timber huts and granaries perched on stilts on islands of dry ground. The most prolific source of bronze artefacts has proved to be the bed of the river Thames, from which dredging operations over the years have retrieved numerous axes, swords, daggers, spearheads and knives (Bradley et al, 1980).

The Iron Age - 700BC to AD43

Walbury Camp on Inkpen Hill lies on high ground overlooking the Kennet Valley and was a considerable feat of construction having massive encircling banks and ditches. It is believed that the earthwork known as Grim's Bank also dates from the Late Iron Age – although much of Silchester and its surrounds are now covered in pine, and have been since the Roman period, there was a distinct absence of pine or evidence of cereal cultivation in environmental samples taken from the bank. It is therefore likely that the bank may therefore have been constructed for demarcation or fortification purposes prior to the Roman period.

In recent decades evidence has been found of many hitherto unsuspected Iron Age settlements, particularly in river valleys and their surrounds. Aerial photography has recorded cropmarks of complex patterns of circles, parallel lines and sub-rectangular enclosures, representing ditched enclosures containing huts, granaries and storage pits, trackways and animal compounds. Evidence of this kind has been found in the Kennet Valley near Aldermaston Wharf (Phillips, D 1993) (Bradley et al, 1980).

In the last century or so before the Roman conquest a number of large nucleated settlements, or *oppida* developed quite often at points commanding major route crossings, some of them defended. In broad terms it is possible to recognize two general types: enclosed *oppida* in which a single defensive circuit defines much of the settlement area; and *territorial oppida* comprising substantial linear ditch systems defining many square kilometres of territory. The *oppidum* at Silchester serves as a model for the type. The Late Iron Age settlement was defended by two systems of banks and ditches (Cunliffe, B 1993)

The Early Medieval period - AD450 to 1065

Evidence of activity in West Berkshire during the Anglo-Saxon period is quite varied. In Burghfield a cemetery with over fifty burials was found with many graves including weapons, pottery and jewellery. We know more about Saxon burial rituals in West Berkshire than their houses, but one sunken-floored hut of a typically Saxon type was discovered and excavated at Upton Nervet, approximately 4 km north-west of the Aldermaston site.

The best known find from this period in the area comes from Silchester in the form of an *ogham* (a form of writing thought to originate in Ireland) inscription, carved on a Roman baluster pillar, recording the burial of *Ebicaetus*, who was probably of Irish origin. Various dates have been proposed for the inscription, the most likely being about AD 500 or soon after. These few scraps hint at the survival of some kind of 'Sub Roman' community using the old defensive circuit throughout the period of Saxon penetration when Germanic enclaves were building up around Dorchester-on-Thames to the north and Winchester to the south. It is possible that in this period Grim's

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Bank was constructed to the north west between the old town and the river Kennet, perhaps in an attempt to stem the southern advance of the Thames-based Saxon armies. The very existence of such a major construction suggest that a substantial community still used Silchester as a base (Cunliffe, B 1993).

The Medieval period - 1066 to 1539

The town of Newbury is believed to have been established as a town soon after the Norman Conquest and possibly as early as the 1080s. Hungerford was recognised as a town by the 1170s. Aldermaston is recorded in the Domesday Book as 'Eldermanstone' with two fisheries and a church, with the first reference as it being a town being in 1298 (Betley, J 1986, p59).

West Berkshire was densely inhabited and a highly cultivated area at the time of the Domesday Survey, and contained large numbers of villages and farmsteads. Aldermaston was a large manor owned by King Edward, contained ploughland for thirty teams, 124 acres of meadow, a mill, fisheries and woodland. (Phillips, D 1993, p36).

In the medieval period there is a large amount of archaeological evidence for the region, particularly in relation to expanding towns and villages, most of which are still in existence today. A medieval deer park belonging to Aldermaston Manor is recorded in early 13th century documents and depicted as an enclosed park on historic maps dating to the 16th century. Medieval deer parks were typically enclosed wooded hunting grounds and were often succeeded by ornamental landscaped parks in the 18th century. This transition can be traced in the history of Aldermaston's Park and Court and is on historic maps spanning the 18th to 19th century.

The Post-Medieval period - 1540 to 1901

During the English Civil War two battles were fought around Newbury. The first took place to the south and west of the town in September 1643. The second, which was a smaller engagement, took place to the north of the town in the Shaw area. No Civil War archaeology is known within the study area.

At the time of the acquisition (1814) the area seems to have been used for pasture (Timmins, G 1999). In 1550 the acreage of the estate was 286, but by 1883, when the estate was under the ownership of Higford Burr it had become 2778 acres. Burr purchased the Aldermaston Estate shortly after the death of William Congreve. The original building at Aldermaston Court had burnt down in 1841, a tragedy that precipitated Congreve's death, and effectively ruined the family. It is also the probable reason that so few estate papers survive (Timmins, G 1999). A new house was built in 1843. The estate, for the first time since the Norman Conquest, had passed out of the lineage of the Achards. What is now the AWE Aldermaston site remained part of the park.

Second World War

The most important archaeological sites in West Berkshire from the modern period are twentieth century military sites. During the Second World War a major anti-invasion defensive line was built across West Berkshire along the Kennet and Avon Canal. This "stop line" was intended to prevent an invading German army from advancing further north. The canal was fortified with large numbers of pillboxes and other defensive features such as road blocks. Many of these monuments are still visible today. Originally part of the Aldermaston Court Estate, the current AWE site was chosen for development as a bomber Operational Training Unit. Three runways were provided with extensive dispersed enclaves and a large bomb dump. Opened on 1st July 1942, the airfield was never used as originally intended but instead was earmarked for use by the United States Army Air Force. As soon as it was habitable, the 60th Troop Carrier Group (TCG) occupied the base with the 10th, 11th, 12th and 28th Troop Carrier Squadrons equipped with C47 (DC-3) transports. Initially used for moving cargo, the transports soon became used for para-troop training.

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A large aircraft shed was taken over by Vickers in July 1943 for the assembly of Spitfires, using parts manufactured by sub-contractors mainly in Reading and Newbury. The aircraft were flight-tested from Aldermaston. Production of Spitfires continued until the Spring of 1945, with the site finally being closed in 1946.

The airfield remained in limbo until May 1946 when BOAC opened its Training HQ at Aldermaston. Dakota, Oxford, York, Halifax, Halton and Viking aircraft could all be seen using the airfield at that time. In January 1947, Aldermaston was temporarily loaned to the Ministry of Civil Aviation as a temporary civil airport and British European Airways joined BOAC to form Airways Training Ltd. However, the school closed in November 1948. At the end of 1947, the number of movements was nearly 10,000 a month, but with the closure of the school, the number dwindled rapidly. There was a brief revival from August 1949 when Eagle Airways set up its HQ at Aldermaston. However, with the decisions to site the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment on the airfield, Eagle Airways departed and MCA relinquished the airfield in April 1950.

Cold War

AWE Aldermaston was developed in the early 1950s as the principal centre for Britain's nuclear weapons programme. Within its perimeter are many unique structures associated with Britain's nuclear weapons projects.

Post-Cold War

Since the end of the Cold War AWE Aldermaston has been in use as a weapons assembly and research centre.



14. GAZETTEER OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SITES IN THE STUDY AREA

A No.	Type	Date	Name / Description	Source Reference	National Grid Reference
Known Sites within the Study Area					
1	Monument	Iron Age/Roman	Grim's Bank Scheduled Ancient Monument 51. (part of SAM Nos 48 & 50)	WB1349 – WB1352	SU 610 637
2	Airfield	Modern	Aldermaston Airfield – Military airfield 1941-45, then in civilian use until 1949	WB15864	SU 594 636
3	Road	Roman	Ermin Street – Course of the Silchester to Cirencester Roman Road.	WB2074	SU 600 639
4	Registered Park and Garden	Post-Medieval	Aldermaston Court, Registered Park & Garden (Grade II), comprising 71.3 hectares	WB1511	SU 592 643
5	Decoy Pond	Post-Medieval	Decoy Pond, Aldermaston – Located inside AWE, within decoy plantation. Curtailed decoy pipe running to NE from the southern end.	WB4886	SU 607 634
6	Airfield	Modern	Remains of airfield discovered during archaeological evaluations in 2005	-	SU 602 640
7	Listed Buildings	Post-Medieval – Modern	Aldermaston Court, and associated listed structures: Aldermaston Court – Grade II* Listed House, 1636, rebuilt in 1848-51 Bridge c. 450m NW of Aldermaston Court – Grade II Listed Bridge, c. 1894 Greenhouse and adjoining wall c50m NW of Aldermaston Court – Grade II Listed mid 19 th century Stable Block c. 150m NW of Aldermaston Court – Grade II Listed c1800 stable block North-East Lodges and Gates to Aldermaston Court –	EH 39498 EH 39501 EH 39499 EH 39500 EH 39532	

