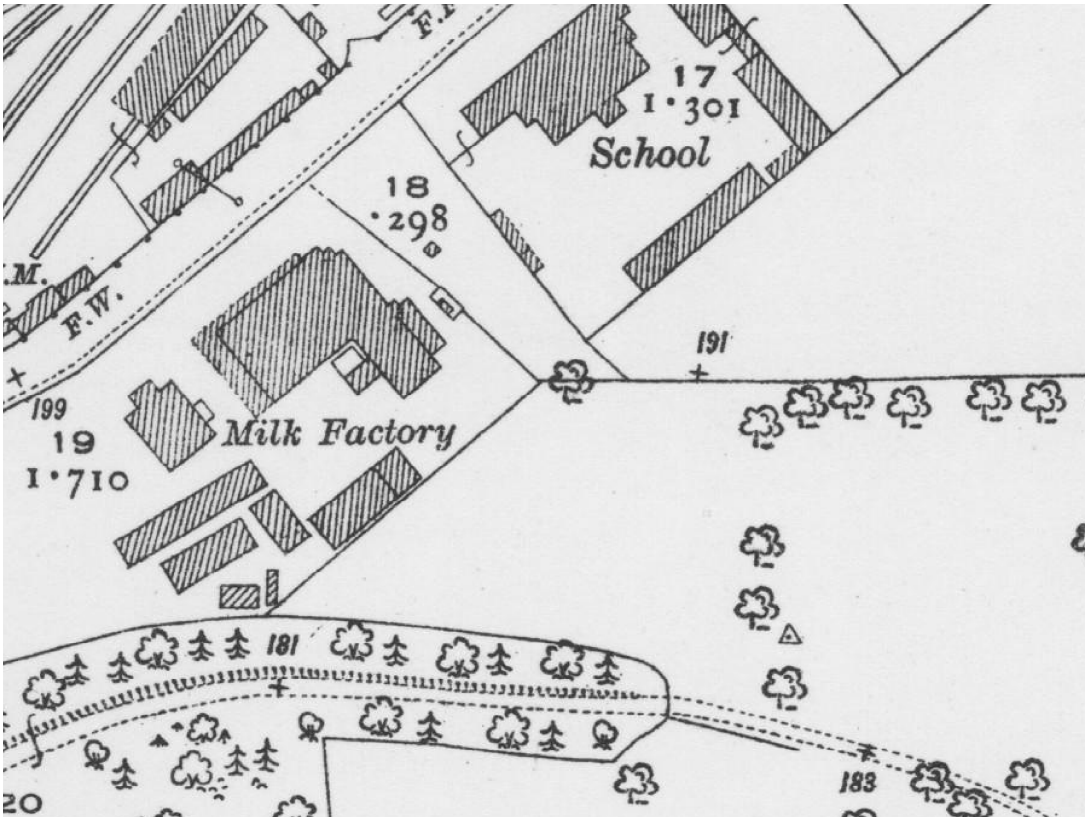
Land at The Car Park, Sadler's Mead, Chippenham, Wiltshire

Wiltshire County Council
Planning Reference 18/10267/FUL

Report on an Archaeological Watching Brief



On behalf of

Vinci Construction UK Limited

Nick Corcos BA, MA, PhD, ACIfA

Avon Archaeology Limited
Bristol: March 2020

CONTENTS

Figures

Plates

Abstract

Avon Archaeology Limited were commissioned by Vinci Construction (UK) Limited to undertake a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording (Archaeological Watching Brief) during groundworks associated with the construction of a new multi-storey car park on a site on the south-western side of Sadler's Mead, Chippenham, Wiltshire. Apart from a very narrow service trench, the work involved chiefly the monitoring of excavated foundation bases for the main concrete structure of the building, with the requirement for the excavation work to penetrate well into the natural substrate, for structural reasons. The work had been required by the local authority in view of occasional earlier finds of archaeological material in the vicinity of the site. The only feature of any note which was identified was almost certainly the alignment of the former south-eastern linear boundary of the early 20th century milk processing and bottling plant which lay immediately to the north-west of the site, and which expressed itself as a backfilled, cut feature running south-west/north-east within the base pits excavated at the north-western side of the site. Although no cultural material whatsoever was identified within the fill of this feature, the known historical context of the site makes it virtually certain that it too was of early 20th century date. Following entirely negative results from foundation bases in the middle of the site, including one of the two largest, the project was terminated with the agreement of the local authority archaeologist. It seems very likely that the entire site had been stripped of its former cultivation deposits at the time of the establishment of the car park, down to the top of the natural, or even slightly below in some places.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Ed Beale and Alex Clements of Vinci Construction Ltd, and to Darren, Aaron, Percy and Andy of D & K Groundworks Ltd, of Portishead, representing the contractors undertaking the actual excavation work. Their patience, interest and good humour was and is greatly appreciated. I am also grateful to my colleague at AAL, Gareth Dickinson, for preparing Figures 2 and 3 of this report.

Notes

Whereas Avon Archaeology Limited has taken all care to produce a comprehensive summary of the known and recorded archaeological evidence, no responsibility can be accepted for any omissions of fact or opinion, however caused.

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Abbreviations

AAL	Avon Archaeology Limited
aOD	Above Ordnance Datum
HER	Historic Environment Record
NGR	National Grid Reference
OASIS	Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations
TNA	The National Archives (Kew, London)
WRO	Wiltshire Record Office
WSI	Written Scheme of Investigation

1 Introduction

The methodology for the work was laid out in an earlier Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Avon Archaeology Ltd, and approved by the local authority, Wiltshire County Council. The archive from this project will in due course be deposited with Chippenham Museum. The local authority planning application under which this project is progressing is 18/10267/FUL, and it involves the erection of a new multi-storey car park within an area which has already been used as an open, ground level car park for many years.

The work was conducted in accordance with the relevant guidelines for Watching Brief projects issued by the Chartered Institute for Archaeology (CIfA) and the guidelines for archaeological projects set out in MoRPHE (Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment, 2015). The work was also underpinned by the guidelines set out at national level in the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework, as revised July 2018). A formal written Scheme of Investigation was produced by AAL to bring together these various requirements, and to outline the methodology for the work. As already noted, this was submitted to, and approved by, the Archaeology Officer for Wiltshire County Council.

It should be noted here, very importantly, that the present project encompasses *only* the south-eastern half of the former Sadler's Mead car park. However, as will be noted from **Figure 2**, the formal red line boundary for the watching brief condition, as laid down by the local authority, encompasses both the area of the present project, *and* that to the north-west, which will be the site of a new office block; the two projects, although physically so close together, are *entirely* separate in terms of ownership and development, and at the time of writing we do not know exactly how the watching brief on that latter part of the site will play out, as there is currently no firm timetable yet on the groundworks for the office block.

2 Topography, Geology, Historical and Archaeological Background

The site itself has a very gentle slope to the south. At its north-western side, elevations of the car park surface centre around 58.80m aOD, declining southwards

so that at the southern boundary, elevations centre on about 57.90m aOD. This is therefore a drop of less than a metre over a linear distance of about 40m, depending on how one measures it, since the shape of the site is essentially that of a distorted triangle (**Figure 2**). The north-eastern side of the side, bounding the western side of Sadler's Mead, lay at about 58.45m aOD. Outside the site, the ground generally falls away to the south, but the gradient is extremely shallow. There is, however, a steep drop *immediately* to the south of the site, where the Olympiad Leisure Centre stands, and the ground floor of which is in the order of 10m lower than the car park surface; and this appears to be at least in part a natural valley profile of the River Avon, which flows from east to west to the south of the site; the sharp break in the slope profile locally may also owe something to a possible geological boundary here, between the Cornbrash Limestone Formation to the north, and the Forest Marble Mudstones to the south, although both lithologies are of Jurassic Age (and see further below).

According to the British Geological Survey, the main hard rock geological underpinning of the site are deposits of the Cornbrash Limestone, laid down in the Middle Jurassic period. BGS describes the physical characteristics of this lithology as

> Limestone, medium- to fine-grained, predominantly bioclastic wackestone and packstone with sporadic peloids; generally and characteristically intensely bioturbated and consequently poorly bedded, although better bedded, commonly somewhat arenaceous units occur in places, particularly in the upper part. Generally bluish grey when fresh, but weathers to olive or yellowish brown. Thin argillaceous partings or interbeds of calcareous mudstone may occur (BGS).

Locally the Cornbrash has been used as a building stone within Chippenham itself, and indeed there was historically a small quarry to extract it within the boundary of the present site, at its northern end, although whether for building, road-building or lime-burning is not clear. It is possible, however, that down the entire length of the western side of the site, the Cornbrash may be masked by much later Quaternary alluvial deposits from the flooding regime of the River Avon, which flows less than 120m to the south of the site's southern edge.

A recent geotechnical investigation of the site by Hydrock Ltd, involved the drilling of 2 boreholes and the excavation of 5 test pits (or window samples). The boreholes

extended in depth down to about 9.70m BGL, and the window samples to between 1.5 to 1.9m BGL. This work found that, essentially, across those parts of the site that were sampled, made ground extended down to between about 0.40 and 0.60m BGL, with undisturbed geological strata thereafter. The window samples confirmed this general finding in terms of depths and the nature of the material covering the geology (Hydrock 2019). This was generally confirmed by the results of the watching brief, the most notable absence being of any kind of cultivation deposit whatsoever; especially striking since as the historic maps clearly show, the area consisted of agricultural enclosures well into modern times. It seems possible therefore that at least any upper archaeological horizons have been removed or seriously truncated, latterly by levelling operations for the present car park, and, in the northern part of the site at least, the excavation of a small quarry which is shown on the First Edition OS map, followed by, presumably, its backfilling and replacement with a milk bottling plant. This was only removed after the mid-1970s.

The approved Heritage Assessment for the proposed development (Cotswold 2018), focused only on the area within the strict site boundary itself, and did not consider the wider historical and archaeological context of the site in terms of the ultimate origins of the town of Chippenham by the late Anglo-Saxon period; which is important since the site does lie only 400m to the north of the historic core of the town. It is, indeed, very likely that this is precisely why a watching brief has been requested for this site in the first place.

Chippenham first emerges into the historical record in the Anglo-Saxon period, and although not specifically recorded as one of the *burhs,* or fortified centres, founded by Alfred the Great, there is every reason to suppose that by the Norman Conquest, it functioned as a fully-fledged town. It was certainly an important royal manor well before the Conquest, and its place-name gives an extremely accurate indication of its physical position – for it is *Cippa's hamme*, 'low lying or meadow land in the bend of a river belonging to or associated with a man called Cippa'. Its siting is extremely favourable strategically, controlling as it does a key bridging point of the river Avon. It also displays clear elements of formal planning, and it is very likely to have been fortified in the Anglo-Saxon period (McMahon 2004). Its importance as a very large member of the ancient demesne of Wessex is attested by the fact that it was not rated for payment of tax, but in 1086, at the time of the Domesday survey, land for

100 ploughs is recorded there, which suggests an extremely large estate (Thorn and Thorn, 1979). It is, therefore, all the more surprising that Chippenham never seems to have been the site of a castle in the post-Conquest period. Chippenham remained essentially a market town embedded in the rural hinterland which it served, until the arrival of the Great Western Railway in the 1840s, and it was this above all else which acted as a catalyst for the much more rapid growth of the town in the second half of the 19th, and into the 20th century. The town centre, and its immediate peripheries, contains numerous listed buildings, with a very few, such as The Yelde Hall, originating at least by the late medieval period. It is very likely, indeed that detailed surveys would reveal far more of the surviving stock to contain medieval elements than is at present suspected.

There are no listed buildings either on or indeed anywhere near the proposed development site, and the same applies to Scheduled Ancient Monuments. In terms of known archaeological assets either on or in the vicinity of the site, there are very few. There have been a great many archaeological interventions within the historic core of the town, mainly in the form of watching briefs or evaluations, and these are listed in the online county HER for Wiltshire[1]. The overwhelming majority of discoveries arising directly from this work, over many years, have, however, been medieval or post-medieval in date. McMahon (2004) lists very few assets of the prehistoric and Romano-British periods anywhere in the area of the town, and although there are suggestions of a possible masonry building, recorded during a watching brief in the vicinity of the Magistrates Court, this is over 1km to the south of the site under discussion here. Otherwise finds of these periods have overwhelmingly been chance discoveries of stray losses. An assemblage of Mesolithic flints was discovered in the early 1950s on a site in or close to the line of Sadlers Way, only a few tens of metres east of the southern end of the site; and very close to, or indeed possibly even within the site, at its southern end, the Wiltshire HER records that

> A small Second World War installation of nine huts and associated service road seen on wartime aerial photographs in the northern end of Monkton Park. The site was removed after the end of the war.

[1] https://services.wiltshire.gov.uk/HistoryEnvRecord/Home/Index

As suggested in that quotation, the site fell within the formal landscaped grounds of the Monkton Park estate, the focus of which was Monkton House, a mid-18th century house 450m to the south-east of the present site, now converted to flats, and on a far earlier, medieval site. The 18th century house is Grade II listed.

Interestingly, the information available on the KnowYourPlace website does not mention the former Wiltshire Creameries Milk Factory, which as already noted, occupied the site immediately to the north-west of the present project, and which is earmarked for the development of an office block. This complex was in existence, or at the very least being constructed, by 1926, as attested by a planning application of that date relating to the Cocklebury Road site (WRO G19/760/173). The company had been incorporated in 1923 and finally dissolved in 1949 (TNA BT 31/33824/189855), although map evidence suggests that the factory buildings had actually been constructed by 1921-22, and only removed after 1974. We do not know whether, up to the time of their removal, they were in whole or in part occupied by another business after the creamery had ceased to trade.

We might, finally, observe that the topographical setting of the town, its relationship to the river and its position as an extremely convenient and blindingly obvious bridging point, makes it highly likely that it has in fact presented an extremely attractive site for occupation perhaps since at least late prehistory, but that earlier traces have been largely removed by the establishment and expansion of the town from the 9th century onwards.

3 Methodology

The monitoring took place over the course of a series of intermittent visits between 13th Jan. and 26th Feb. 2020. Field notes were kept, and a photographic record of the progress of the work was made. For all of the interventions, the machine used a toothless bucket to remove deposits on top of the natural substrate, and only when it was clear, in each case, that there were no features cut into the top of the natural, was the machine permitted to switch to a toothed bucket to cut into the brashy limestone bedrock. Aside from a single very narrow service trench running north-south along the pavement immediately outside the site, on the western side of

Sadler's Mead, the monitoring was focussed entirely on the excavation of a series of bases for the major vertical members that would support the concrete structure of the multi-storey car park. These are shown in **Figure 3**.

4 The Monitoring

The state of the site prior to the commencement of the excavation work is shown on **Plate 1**. All of the low, kerbed 'islands' that can be seen in the image were removed for the work. In terms of actual deposits making up the generality of the site, it became apparent fairly quickly that they consisted almost entirely of various kinds of make-up, directly on top of the natural Cornbrash limestone. This consisted overwhelmingly of the tarmac surface of the car park, laid on top of a make-up and levelling layer consisting of gravel scalpings. **Plates 2** to **14** to provide an idea of typical sections within the interventions that were monitored, with Plate positions identified on **Figure 3**. The plate captions give location and other details. The maximum depth of these interventions was 1.8m below the car park surface, as most typically represented by the eight structural bases on the north-western side of the site, running in a line north-east/south-west (**Plate 4**). These were of slightly varying sizes but the largest, **Bases 3** and **4** on **Figure 3**, measured *about* 4m square. It should also be noted that because of the requirements of spoil management, the bases were actually excavated alternately, so that numbers 1, 3, 5, and 7 were done first, and then numbers 2, 4, 6 and 8. **Bases 6** and **8** were not monitored, but were fully examined after excavation, and **Bases 9** and **10** were fully monitored. Numerous modern services were noted sealed by the car park surface, usually former telecoms or electricity cables. An active fibre optic cable ran very tight along the top of the north-western sections of the bases at the north-western side of the site; and in the northern corner of **Base 6**, a modern plastic drainage pipe, in a concrete casing, was sealed below the car park surface, and running roughly southwards (**Plate 9**). This was pretty much identical in form and construction to the pipe noted running across the width of **Base 20**.

As already noted, the car park surface at the north-western side of the site centred at an elevation of around 58.80m aOD, so that the formation level of the bottom of this

set of bases was at about 57m aOD. For example the bottom of **Base 6**, after a thin skim of concrete had been poured to provide a dead level surface, was measured at 57.20m aOD by the client's site surveyor using a Leica robotic total station. On the north-eastern side of the site, the south-west facing section of **Base 19** (depth 1.80m, level of base, 56.64m aOD) *appeared* to display what looked like a remnant subsoil (**Plate 11**), but in view of the findings over the remainder of the monitored interventions, it now seems more likely to have represented a part of the backfill of the original service trench in the pavement very close by just outside the site, on the western side of Sadler's Mead, which was, as already noted, recut during the present project for a new EV cable. This deposit, 0.38m thick, was entirely devoid of cultural material of any kind. This trench consisted entirely of the pavement surface and modern make up deposits, just intruding onto the top of the weathered natural substrate (**Plates 2** and **3**).

The intervention for **Bases 20** and **21** together formed the largest single excavation that was monitored, and provided a very useful window for examination virtually in the middle of the site (**Figure 3**, **Plates 12** and **13**). **Base 20** was fully monitored, and **Base 21** was partially monitored. At 1.50m below the current car park surface, the depth of **Base 20** was rather less than that for the other interventions up to that point, to take account of the general southerly downward slope of the site. The north-east facing section of **Base 20**, however, revealed the same narrative of, essentially, modern car park make-up layers above fractured and weathered, but in situ, natural Cornbrash, in turn sitting on top of the unweathered natural. At the north-western end of this intervention, a modern drain consisting of a plastic insert in a concrete casing, and running roughly east-west, had been cut into the natural and then sealed by the car park surface.

A further intervention, a rectangular excavation of 4.30m x 2.50m, was made at the south-eastern side of the site, very close to the southern boundary (**Figure 3**). This was to test for the exact location of existing electrical services, and was related to the trench for the new EV cable running north-south, excavated in the pavement on the west side of Sadler's Mead, and which was fully monitored (**Plates 2** and **3**). This

intervention was entirely negative archeologically, consisting only of the car park surface and make-up lying on top of the natural Cornbrash substrate (**Plate 14**).

The sole feature that could in any way be described as of minimal archaeological interest, was a linear cut found to be running south-west/north-east, observed in the sections, albeit intermittently, in all of the square bases which ran along the site's north-western boundary, ie **Bases 1-8** (**Figure 3**). The feature seemed to run apparently exactly parallel with, and very close to the south-east of, the low wall which currently separates the site from the two car parks on its north-western side – one belonging to Openreach, and the one to its north-east a former public car park, but now closed for use. The feature was first identified in plan during the stripping of **Base 1** (**Plate 5**). It was then traced in section through the other bases. It was perhaps best expressed, however, in the north-east facing section of **Base 3** (**Figure 3, Plate 8**). Because it was so obviously the same feature throughout this set of bases, this cut was given a group number of [100]. As expressed on **Plate 8**, it seemed clearly to have been cut from high up, and then sealed by the car park surface. There were occasional modern services cut into its fill, as witness the plastic pipe shown on **Plates 6** and **8**. At its widest point, it measured 1.70m, and depth as found in **Base 3** was just over 1m. The sides were steep, and the base concave. The profile appeared pretty symmetrical, but this did vary somewhat throughout the various bases on this side of the site, probably because of differential damage done when what it originally contained was removed (see further below). The fill of the feature as recorded from **Base 3** (101), was a mid-brown silty clay, of soft compaction and rather friable in the hand, acting as a matrix for numerous pebble-size sub-angular stones, clearly derived from the natural Cornbrash. This means that, while the *matrix* was not compact, the deposit as a whole could be described as firm to hard in places. There were no inclusions evident, and it was noted especially that there was an absence of charcoal, and of any finds at all. The deposit as a whole seemed no less compact than the surrounding material, and certainly did not have the nature of a 'typical' ditch fill. This may also explain why, while there was a low degree of root activity, it was not as great as might have been expected had the material been rather less compact. It seemed to us, therefore, that whatever this

feature was, it had been backfilled in a single episode with essentially redeposited natural.

In reviewing both the nature of the feature itself, its context, and the historic map evidence, it is our view that this feature, on present knowledge, is most likely to represent the grubbed out and backfilled remnant of the south-eastern boundary wall of the Wiltshire Creameries milk 'factory', which dates from the early 1920s (**Cover**). It seems as though the original south-eastern boundary of the milk factory, as indicated in an aerial photograph of 1934 (**Figure 4**), was probably removed at the time of the establishment of the present car parks, and the present low boundary wall was established immediately to the north-west of the original line.

Throughout the course of the work, however, what was most striking, however, was the total absence of anything that could be described remotely as a cultivation or agricultural deposit, underneath the car park make up layers, and, as already noted for Base 19, the apparent complete absence of any cultural material whatsoever, of any date, in any of the deposits from the monitored interventions. It is clear from the historic map evidence that this area remained as open and undeveloped land well into the 20th century, and although it was a part of the formal parkland attached to Monkton House, we learn from the mid-19th century tithe survey that much of the parkland was used for pasture at that date. And indeed, post-war aerial photography shows the survival up to at least the early 1950s of a large area of ridge and furrow immediately to the east of the site, on the north-eastern side of Sadler's Mead and occupying an area in the angle between it and Cocklebury Road; and indeed remnants of it are still clearly visible on LiDAR images of the extensive playing fields attached to the Wiltshire College campus. As observed in virtually all of the monitored sections however (see **Plates**), the stratigraphy consisted of modern car park make-up lying directly on top of the natural substrate, quite often with cuts for a variety of modern services, whether drainage, telecoms or electricity. At least some of these were clearly related to the large BT Openreach building, immediately outside the site to the north-west.

A visit by the County Archaeologist took place on the afternoon of Wednesday, 26th February, and after a site inspection of those interventions which remained open at that time, and discussion with both representatives of Vinci Construction Ltd, and the AAL member of staff attending the site, it was agreed that, in view of the negative findings up to that point, the project could be safely terminated without prejudice to the conditions and terms of the watching brief.

5 Conclusion

At no point during the course of this monitoring project were any features, deposits or structures identified which might have been of notable significance, or indeed any, archaeological interest. While it is likely that the watching brief has identified the alignment of the original south-eastern boundary wall of the Wiltshire Creameries milk factory, immediately to the north-west of the site, it must be said that this would be considered of low archaeological significance.

It is our view, therefore, that at the time of the establishment of the car park, which is undated with precision but is likely to have been in the late 1970s or early 1980s, the entire area was comprehensively stripped down to the natural substrate, as part of the process of preparing a relatively level car park surface.

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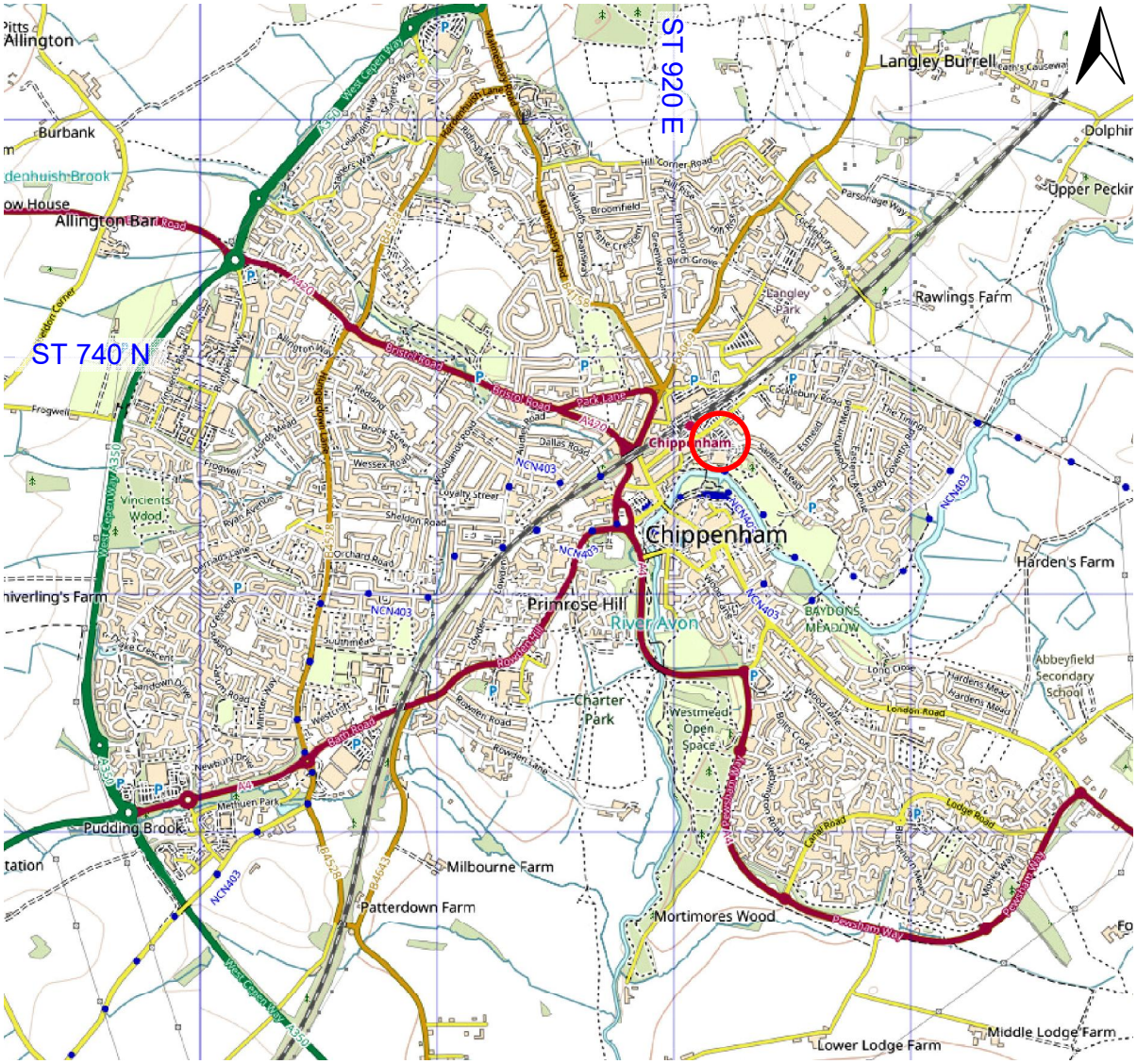
Figure 1

Location of the Site

The Site

Plans and maps based on the Ordnance Survey Sheets are represented by the permission of Her Majesty's Stationery Office.



Grid lines at 1km intervals

Figure 2

Site Plan Showing Red Line Boundary

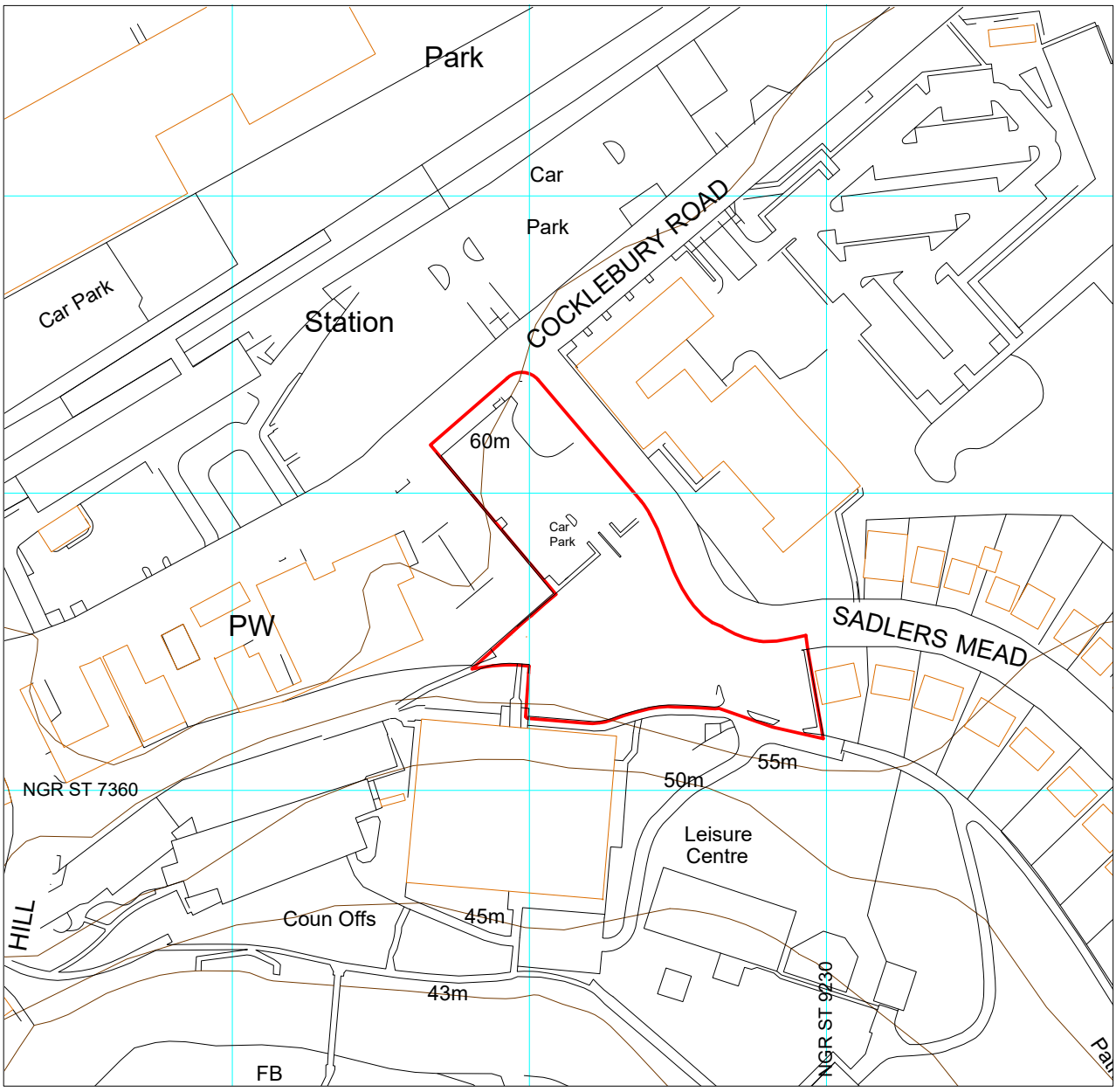
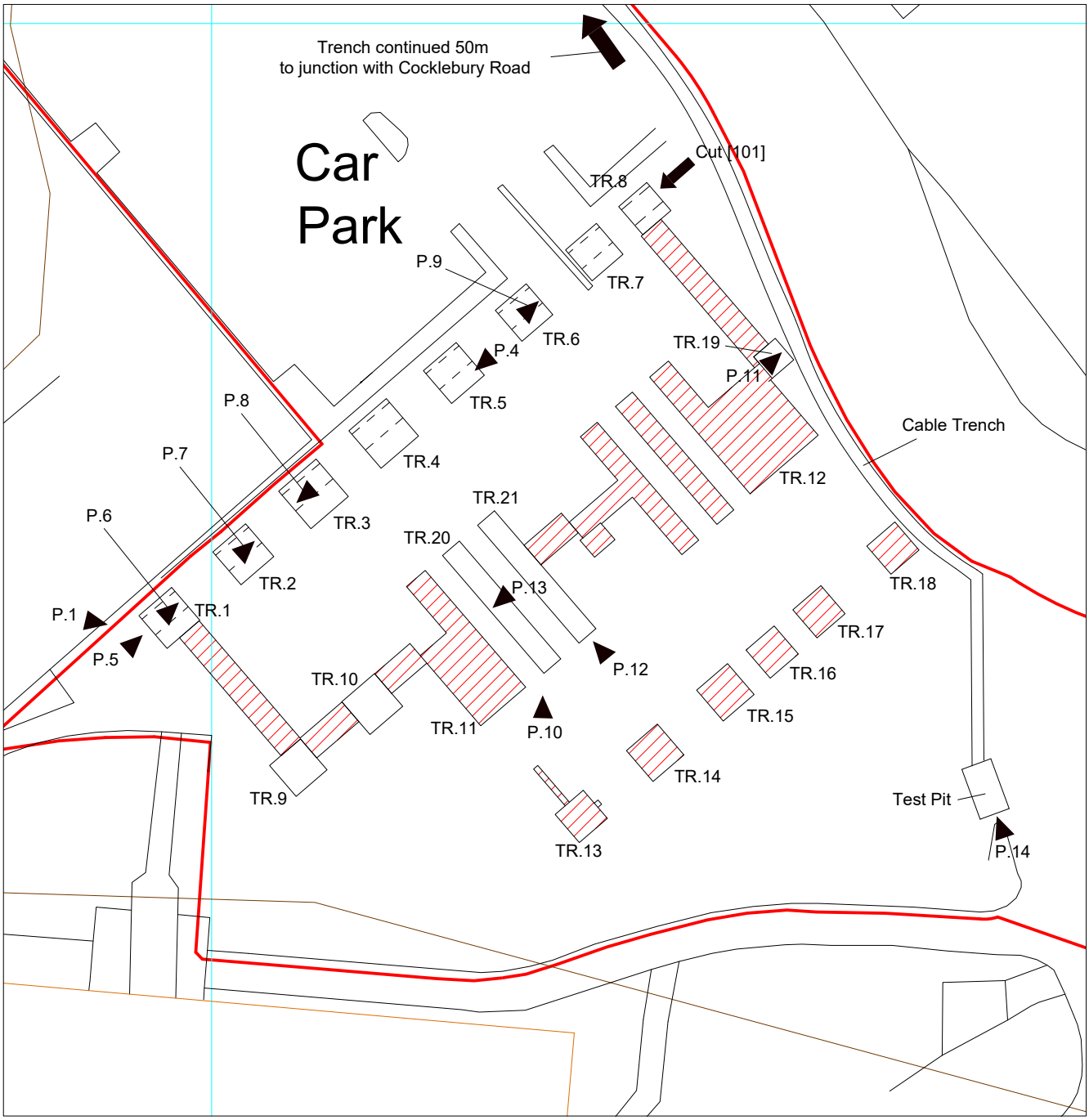


Figure 3

Site Plan Showing Excavated Trenches



P.# ▶ Plate number and direction

TR.# Trench (Base) number

Trench excavated but not monitored

0m 25m

Avon Archaeology Limited
March 2020

Figure 4

Oblique aerial image of the Wiltshire Creameries factory, on the southern side of Cocklebury Road, 1934. Looking south-west. The building with playing courts to the left of the factory (ie to its north-east) is a school. The south-eastern boundary of the factory site (indicated) is most likely to represent the linear feature identified as [100] in the course of the watching brief, running along the north-western side of the site. The River Avon can just be seen at the very top left corner of the frame. It seems possible, or even likely, that vestiges of the factory may remain underneath the north-western half of the site, which is now earmarked for development with an office block. Source: *Britain from Above* online aerial imagery, Historic England. Full reference as shown on the image.

Plates

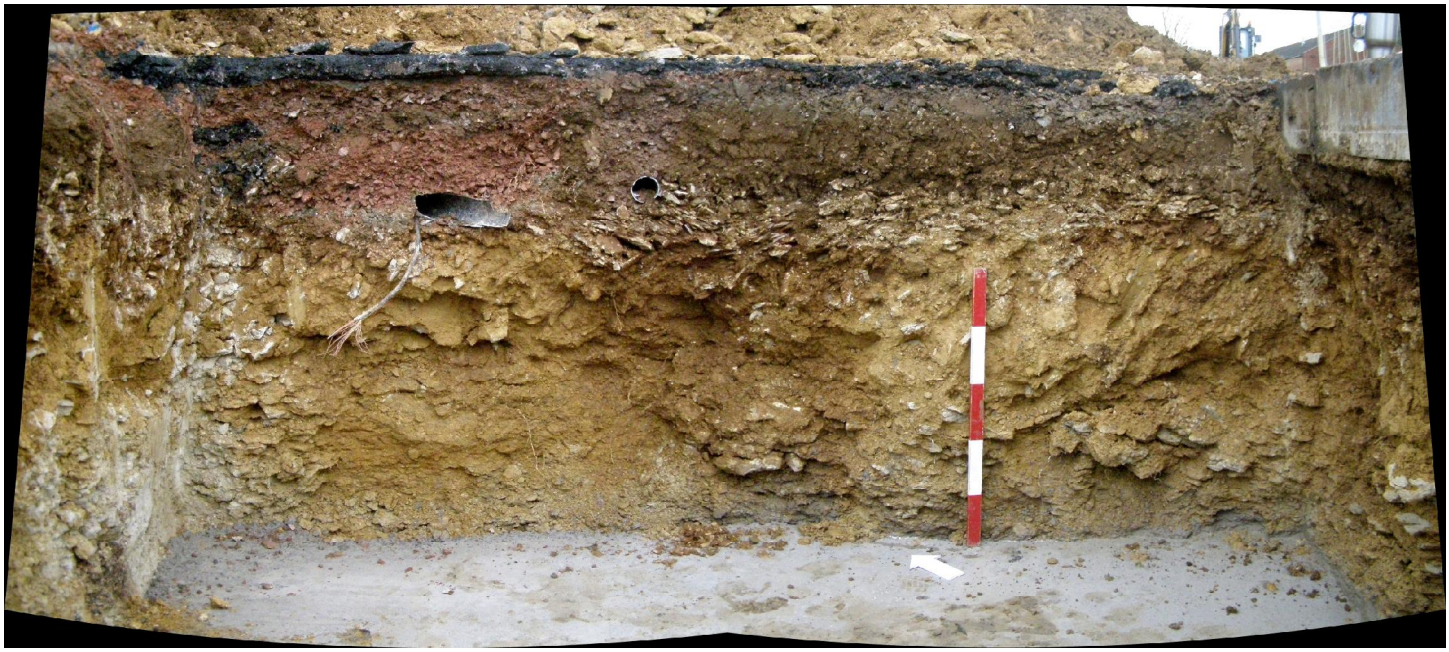
1. Composite panoramic view of the site prior to the commencement of excavation work. Taken from the western corner. The image pans round from north-east (left hand side of frame) to east (right hand side of frame).

2. Trench for a new EV cable being inserted into an existing service cut in the pavement just outside the north-eastern side of the site, on the western side of Sadler's Mead. Scale: 1m

3. Detail of cable trench section showing modern make up on top of the natural Cornbrash bedrock, just showing up at the base of the trench. Scale: 1m

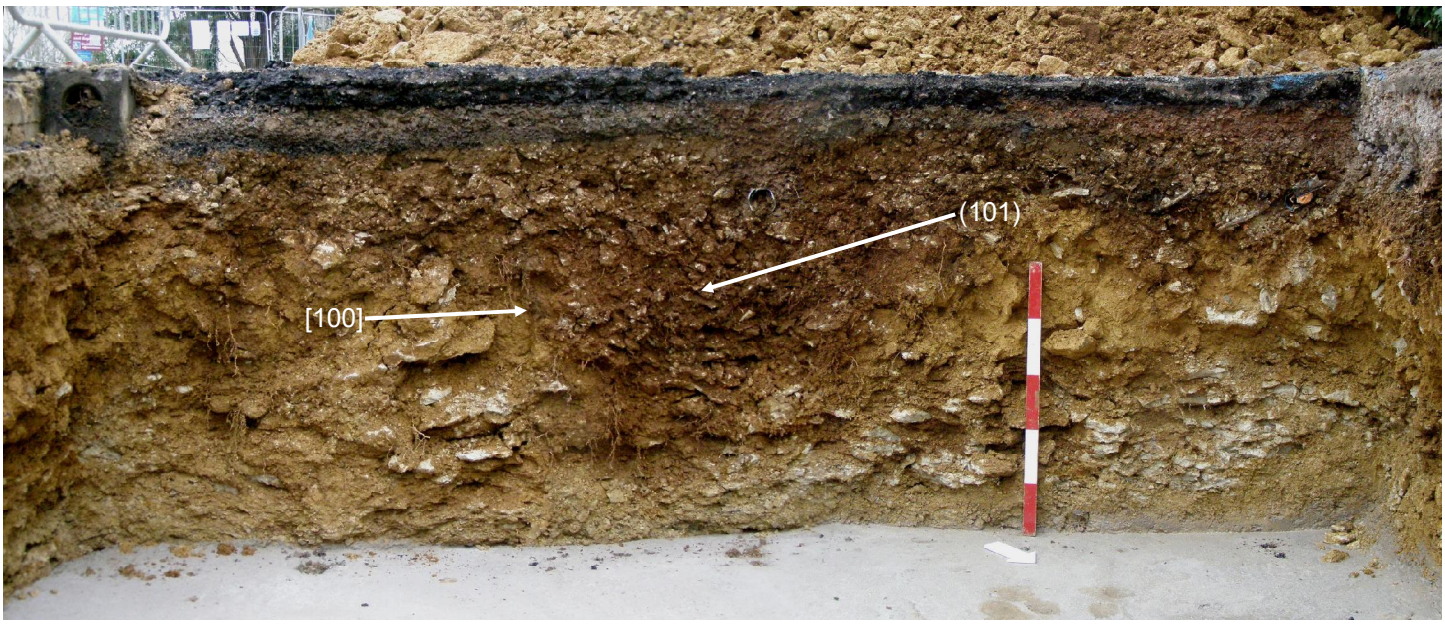
4. General view of structural column bases on the north-western side of the site, prior to excavation. Base 1 in the background, Base 5 closest to the camera. View to south-west.

5. Base 1 under excavation, showing linear cut [100]. View to north-east. Scale: 1m.



6. Base 1 fully excavated and with concrete skim in place. South-west facing section, showing linear cut [100] and fill (101). Note modern services in the section. The plastic pipe on the right is the same as that seen in the section of Base 3 (**Plate 7**). Scale: 1m.

7. Base 2, south-west facing section, prior to pouring of concrete skim in the base. Note cut and fill of north-east/south-west linear, shown in plan in **Plate 5.** Scale: 1m.



8. Base 3, excavation complete and concrete skim in base. North-east facing section, showing linear cut [100] and fill (101). Note plastic service pipe cut into the top of (101). Scale: 1m.

9. Base 6, south-west facing section. Modern concrete encased plastic pipe in the northern corner of the section, with vestige of cut [100] to the right. Scale: 1m.

10. Starting excavation of Bases 20 and 21, following stripping of tarmac surface of former car park. View to north.

11. Base 19, south-west facing section. The car park make up lies on top of what initially appeared to be a remnant cultivation subsoil, but which on closer inspection was probably part of the backfill of a modern service (probably EV) trench in the pavement immediately outside the site to the north-east. The site boundary fencing can be seen at the very top of the image. Scale: 1m.

12. Base 20, fully excavated, but prior to pouring of concrete skim. View to north-north-west. Note collapse of the car park surface at the far end, on the left-hand side, which is where a major modern drain crosses the line of the trench. Scale: 1m.

13. Base 20, north-east facing section. The stratigraphy here, right in the middle of the site, consists of various types of levelling and make up for the car park surface, resting on fractured and weathered, but in situ, natural Cornbrash limestone. Scale: 1m.

14. Image of the non-structural intervention on the south-eastern side of the site, related to the installation of the new EV cable which runs north-south from the site, out into the pavement on the western side of Sadler's Mead. North as indicated. Scale: 1m.