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St Helen's Mill Abingdon, Oxfordshire

Interim Report on Archaeological Monitoring
of Ground Investigation



Ref: 114120.02
September 2016



**St. Helen's Mill,
Abingdon, Oxfordshire**

Report on Archaeological Monitoring of Ground Investigation

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St. Helen's Mill, Abingdon, Oxfordshire

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St. Helen's Mill, Abingdon, Oxfordshire

Report on Archaeological Monitoring of Ground Investigation

Summary

Wessex Archaeology (WA) was commissioned by CH2M to monitor ground investigation works in advance of a proposed flood defence scheme at St. Helen's Mill, Abingdon, Oxfordshire on National Grid Reference (NGR) 449595 196745. The ground investigations comprised two observation pits and two window samples. This interim report presents the results of the archaeological monitoring of the ground investigations, which was undertaken on the 26th July 2016.

The observation pits and window samples were all hand-excavated. The deposits encountered consisted of made ground, with the exception of a limestone structure located in a window sample at the south-eastern end of the site. No further archaeological remains were observed during the works, though Ceramic Building Material was present in an undated made ground deposit at the northern end of the Site.



St. Helen's Mill, Abingdon, Oxfordshire

Report on Archaeological Monitoring of Ground Investigation

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The archaeological monitoring was undertaken by Richard Payne. This report was written by Richard Payne and edited by Ruth Panes. The project was managed on behalf of Wessex Archaeology by Ruth Panes.



St. Helen's Mill, Abingdon, Oxfordshire

Interim Report on Archaeological Monitoring of Ground Investigation

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project background

- 1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology (WA) was commissioned by CH2M to monitor ground investigations in advance of a proposed flood defence scheme at St. Helen's Mill, Abingdon, Oxfordshire centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 449595 196745 (hereafter 'the Site', **Figure 1**). The ground investigations comprised of two observation pits and two window samples.
- 1.1.2 The flood defence scheme will comprise an extension to the existing low wall to the north of the scheme, at the same level as the brick wall to the north, by the removed bridge location, and finishing at the end of the concrete topped piled bank support to the south. The new wall will extend to approximately 33m in length and will protect the access route to the residential car park (CH2M 2016b).
- 1.1.3 A Cultural Heritage Desk Based Assessment and Heritage Statement has been produced for the proposed flood defence scheme (CH2M 2016a). This document determines, as far as is possible from existing resources, the nature, extent and significance of the historic environment resource within the Site and its environs. In addition, this document provides an initial assessment of the potential impact of the proposed flood defence scheme on the heritage assets.
- 1.1.4 This archaeological report solely presents the results of the archaeological monitoring that took place on the 26th July 2016.
- 1.1.5 A Specification for Archaeological Monitoring of the Ground Investigation was undertaken in July 2016 (CH2M, 2016b). This document outlined the methodology and procedures required to undertake the archaeological monitoring works.

2 SITE DESCRIPTION

- 2.1.1 The Site is located along the east bank of the River Ock at St. Helen's Mill, Abingdon, Oxfordshire. The Site comprises a tarmac access route running alongside the west side of the Mill, edged with grassed areas between the access way and the river (**Figure 1**).
- 2.1.2 The Site is bounded by the River Ock to the west, St. Helen's Wharf and the River Thames to the south, St Helens Court to the north and St. Helens Mill House and associated buildings to the east.
- 2.1.3 The Site is level and at a height of between 50.3m and 50.8m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) recorded within the 2002 version of the British National Grid coordinate system, OSGB36 (02).



- 2.1.4 The British Geological Survey records that the geology of the Site is Ampthill Clay Formation and Kimmeridge Clay Formation (undifferentiated) Mudstone, which formed 163 – 152 million years ago (British Geological Survey online viewer). This is overlain by superficial deposits of Alluvium (clay, silt, sand and gravel).

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1.1 The following information is summarised from the Cultural Heritage Desk Based Assessment and Heritage Statement for the proposed scheme (CH2M 2016a).
- 3.1.2 St Helen's Mill lies on the edge of the historic core of Abingdon. No documentary records specific to St Helen's Mill were found in Abingdon Library, Oxfordshire History Centre or Berkshire Archives. However, the mill should be seen in its general historical context within Abingdon and the town's growth from the medieval period onwards.
- 3.1.3 The area occupied by St Helen's Church, which lies 100m east of the proposed scheme, and its immediate environs has been subject to archaeological intervention in the past. Archaeological evidence recovered has pointed to a human presence (in terms of direct settlement) in the area since approximately 600BC (Oxford Archaeology 2012). Settlement is thought to have originated in the area of the Abbey and spread gradually south-westwards to the site of St Helen's Church by the Middle Iron Age date. By the Late Iron Age Abingdon was a thriving settlement surrounded by defensive ditches (an oppidum), which lay beneath the modern town centre.
- 3.1.4 The area of the oppidum was in use throughout the Roman period, though it is possible that certain parts of the former Iron Age settlement had fallen into disuse. There was continuity of settlement occurred from the Romano-British through to the early medieval (Anglo-Saxon) period. Sunken feature buildings characteristic of this period and dating to the 5th century have been found within the town along with pottery and other finds (Oxford Archaeology, 2012). St Helen's Church was established prior to the Abbey, whose foundation is dated to AD 675. A church is recorded on the present site in AD 995. However, no structural evidence of a pre-Conquest church has yet been found and the earliest church fabric dates to the 13th century when it was completely rebuilt. Further major episodes of rebuilding took place in the 14th and 15th centuries. Burial took place exclusively at the Abbey until the 16th century, after which it was allowed in the churchyard. These burials, along with the construction of vaults, are likely to have disturbed earlier archaeological deposits but to an uncertain degree.
- 3.1.5 An archaeological watching brief on a pipe trench west of the church identified buried remains of a former church-related building that was of late medieval or early post-medieval date. This ran underneath Twitty's Almshouses (constructed 1709) (Oxford Archaeology 2012).
- 3.1.6 Abingdon Abbey was founded in Saxon times, possibly around AD 676. In the 13th and 14th centuries, Abingdon was a flourishing agricultural centre with an extensive trade in wool and a famous weaving and clothing manufacturing industry. The abbot seems to have held a market from very early times and charters for the holding of markets and fairs were granted by various sovereigns, from Edward I to George II. Archaeological intervention 200m north east of the site on East St Helen's Street recorded archaeological remains relating to medieval and post-medieval settlement of the site. Some degree of terracing had taken place and the medieval and post-medieval archaeology was surviving at shallow depths (John Moore Heritage Services 2012).

4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 4.1.1 With due regard to the ClfA guidelines outlined in *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (ClfA 2014a), the principle aim of the archaeological watching brief is to identify and record the archaeological resource during development within a specified area using appropriate methods and practices, in compliance with the *Code of Conduct* and other relevant by-laws of the ClfA.
- 4.1.2 Specific objectives defined in the Specification for Archaeological Monitoring of the Ground Investigation (CH2M 2016b) were:
- *Focus on monitoring the two observation pits (OP01 and OP02) - no observation will be required on the two exploratory boreholes (WS01 and WS02);*
 - *Recover any significant dateable material;*
 - *Record any artefactual, eco-factual or feature-based archaeological evidence disturbed by the GI process,*
 - *Record any structural remains associated with the 19th century footbridge across the River Ock and any other archaeological remains within what was an island in between the two historic river streams;*
 - *Establish the archaeological significance of the deposits disturbed by the investigation;*
 - *Record the nature of the dumped material used to reclaim land from the historic course of the river;*
 - *Make a stratigraphic record of the deposits or features exposed;*
 - *Produce a report on the stratigraphic sequence of deposits within the two observation pits,*
 - *The results of the main geotechnical report produced by principal contractor White Young Green (WYG) will be utilised by Wessex Archaeology and the results integrated into the final archaeological report.*

5 METHODOLOGY

5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 All works were carried out in accordance with the Specification for Archaeological Monitoring of the Ground Investigation for the works (CH2M 2016b) and the *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (ClfA 2014a).

5.2 Health and safety

- 5.2.1 Health and safety considerations were of paramount importance in conducting all fieldwork. Safe working practices will override archaeological considerations at all times. All work was carried out in accordance with the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1992, and all other relevant Health and Safety legislation, regulations and codes of practice in force at the time.

5.3 Excavation methodology

- 5.3.1 The two hand dug Observation Pits **OP01** and **OP02** (**Plates 1** and **2**) were approximately 0.4m by 0.4m in extent. **OP01** measured 1.2m in depth and **OP02** measured 1.4m in depth.

5.3.2 Although monitoring of the two Window Samples **WS01** and **WS02** was not specified as a requirement within the Specification for Archaeological Monitoring, initial hand excavations were undertaken prior to drilling, during the archaeological monitoring period for the observation pits. Hand excavation of the holes for the Window Samples were therefore also monitored and recorded (**Figure 1, Plates 3 and 4**).

5.4 Recording

5.4.1 All locations were scanned with a cable detection tool prior to excavation. All excavations were located using a Leica Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) instrument receiving Real Time Kinematic (RTK) corrections from the Ordnance Survey OS Net service. The survey was recorded within the British National Grid coordinate system using the OSGB (02) transformation, working to a 3D accuracy of below 30mm.

5.4.2 All exposed archaeological deposits were recorded using WA's *pro forma* recording system.

5.4.3 A photographic record was maintained during the investigation using digital cameras equipped with an image sensor of not less than 10 megapixels. Digital images will be subject to managed quality control and curation processes which will embed appropriate metadata within the image and ensure long term accessibility of the image set.

6 RESULTS

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 Excavations comprised of two observation pits and two window samples along the east side of the River Ock (**Figure 1**). Archaeological remains were identified in one of the Window Samples, **WS02**. There were no archaeological deposits observed in the three other excavations **OP01, OP02** or **WS01**.

6.2 Soil sequence

6.2.1 The deposit sequence encountered varied in the excavations, though made ground deposits were observed in **OP01, OP02** and **WS01**. Within **OP01** and **OP02** tarmac was present which sealed the made ground deposits. Within **WS01**, topsoil sealed the underlying deposits. Hand excavation of the observation pits and window samples did not exceed 1.4m below ground level although further ground investigations were carried out, the results of which are presented within the ground investigation report (WYG 2016).

6.3 Archaeological features and deposits

6.3.1 Window Sample **WS02 (Plate 4)** contained horizontally aligned limestone rubble blocks with evidence of mortared joints (Deposit **4002**). The mortar comprised a pink lime based mortar which was visible adhering to some of the blocks. Observations were limited by the size of the excavation area (0.5m by 0.4m) and it was not possible to clearly see the possible structure in profile. No finds were recovered from the deposit. Further ground investigations (WYG 2016) revealed Deposit **4002** was present to a depth of 1.6m below ground level.

6.3.2 Window Sample **WS01 (Plate 3)** contained sparse Ceramic Building Material (CBM) and limestone rubble within made ground deposit **3002**.

7 FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL

7.1.1 No artefacts were recovered during the archaeological monitoring.



- 7.1.2 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified during the archaeological monitoring.

8 CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1.1 The archaeological monitoring of the two observation pits and two window samples at St. Helen's Mill, Abingdon was very limited in extent but revealed the remains of a mortared limestone structure in one Window Sample to the south of the Site. This may represent part of a riverside wall or revetment. No dating evidence was recovered from the investigations and the remaining observation pits and window samples revealed no archaeological remains, aside from Ceramic Building Material present within an undated made ground deposit at the northern end of the Site.

9 STORAGE AND CURATION

9.1 Museum

- 9.1.1 Deposition of any finds with a Museum will only be carried out with the full agreement of the landowner. In the interim the archive will be held at the offices of Wessex Archaeology at Old Sarum, Salisbury, Wiltshire under the project code **114120** and accession number **OXCMS:2016.128**.

9.2 Preparation of archive

- 9.2.1 The complete site archive, which will include paper records, photographic records, graphics, and digital data, will be prepared following the standard conditions for the acceptance of excavated archaeological material by the local museum, and in general following nationally recommended guidelines (SMA 1995; ClfA 2014b; Brown 2011; ADS 2013).
- 9.2.2 All archive elements will be marked with the project code **114120** and a full index will be prepared.

9.3 Discard policy

- 9.3.1 WA follows the guidelines set out in *Selection, Retention and Dispersal* (Society of Museum Archaeologists 1993), which allows for the discard of selected artefact and ecofact categories which are not considered to warrant any future analysis. Any discard of artefacts will be fully documented in the project archive.
- 9.3.2 The discard of environmental remains and samples follows nationally recommended guidelines (SMA 1993; 1995; English Heritage 2011).

9.4 OASIS record

- 9.4.1 Following the completion of the archaeological investigation and the WYG geotechnical report on the investigations, an OASIS online record <http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/projects/oasis/> will be initiated and key fields completed on Details, Location and Creators Forms. All appropriate parts of the OASIS online form will be completed for submission to the Oxfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER). This will include an uploaded pdf version of the entire report (a paper copy will also be included with the archive).

9.5 Copyright

- 9.5.1 The full copyright of the written/illustrative archive relating to the Site will be retained by Wessex Archaeology Ltd under the *Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988* with all rights reserved. The recipient museum, however, will be granted an exclusive licence for the use of the archive for educational purposes, including academic research, providing that such



use shall be non-profit making, and conforms with the *Copyright and Related Rights regulations* 2003.

9.6 Security copy

9.6.1 In line with current best practice (e.g. Brown 2011), on completion of the project a security copy of the written records will be prepared, in the form of a digital PDF/A file. PDF/A is an ISO-standardised version of the Portable Document Format (PDF) designed for the digital preservation of electronic documents through omission of features ill-suited to long-term archiving.

10 REFERENCES

Archaeology Data Services [ADS], 2013 *Caring for Digital Data in Archaeology: a guide to good practice*, Archaeology Data Service & Digital Antiquity Guides to Good Practice

Brown, D.H., 2011 *Archaeological archives; a guide to best practice in creation, compilation, transfer and curation*, Archaeological Archives Forum (revised edition)

Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA), 2014a *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief*

Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA), 2014b *Standard and Guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives*

CH2M, 2016a *St. Helen's Mill, Abingdon: Cultural Heritage Desk-Based Assessment and Heritage Statement*

CH2M, 2016b *St. Helen's Mill, River Ock, Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Specification for Archaeological Monitoring of Ground Investigation*

John Moore Heritage Services, 2012 *An Archaeological Watching Brief at 51 East St Helen Street, Abingdon, Oxfordshire*

Oxford Archaeology 2012 *St Helen's Church, Abingdon: Archaeological Watching Brief Report*

SMA, 1995 *Towards an Accessible Archaeological Archive*, Society of Museum Archaeologists

WYG, 2016 *Abingdon Flood Schemes (St.Helen's Mill) Ground Investigation Factual Report*



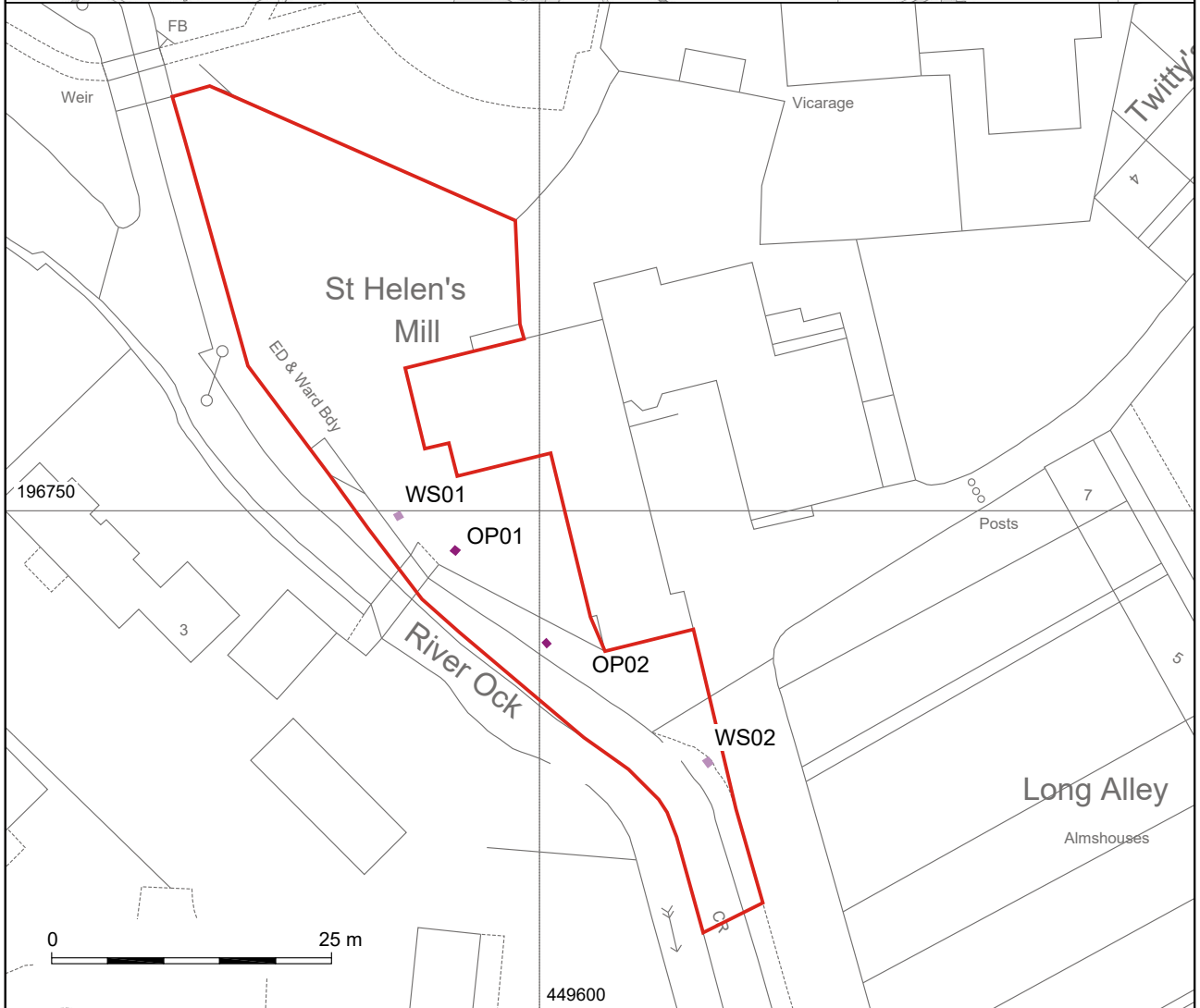
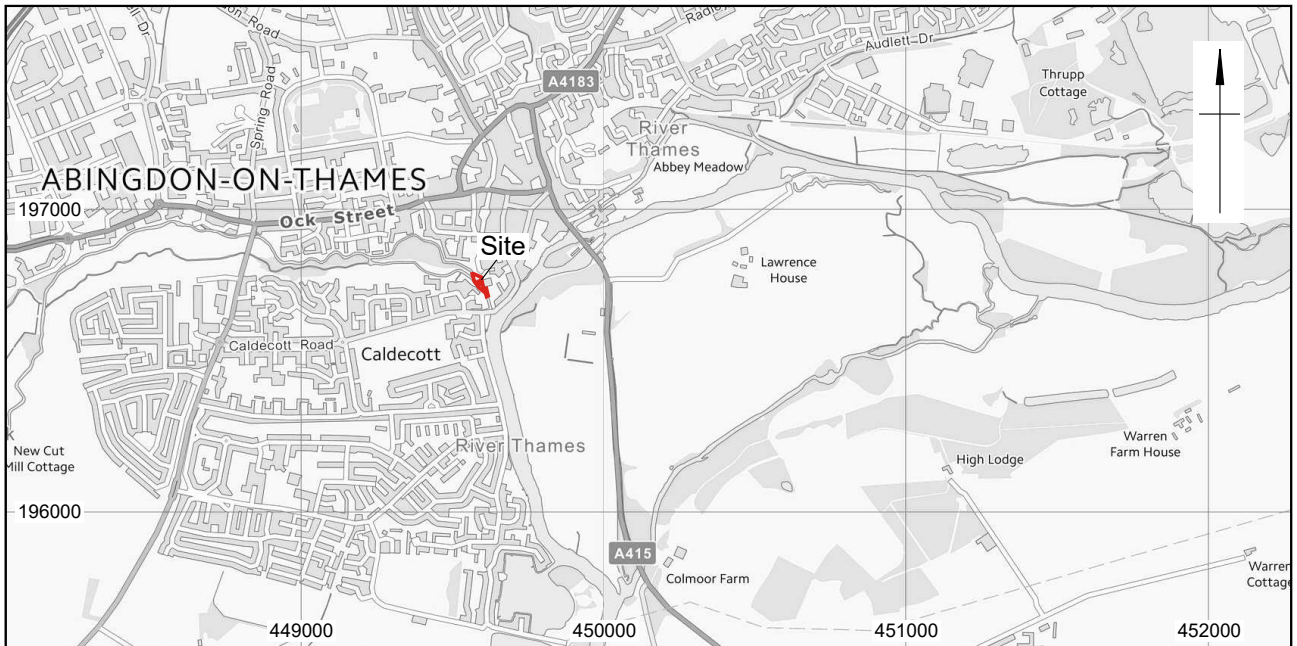
11 APPENDIX 1: TEST PIT AND CONTEXT SUMMARIES

Test Pit OP01	Dimensions :	0.4m x 0.4m x 1.2m	Ground surface level:	50.65m aOD
	Coordinates (NGR):	449587.535, 196749.466		
Context	Category	Description	Depth (bgl)	
1001	Layer	Made ground. Tarmac	0 - 0.1m	
1002	Layer	Orange brown sandy gravel, containing sparse CBM and limestone rubble inclusions	0.1 – 1.2m	

Test Pit OP02	Dimensions :	0.4m x 0.3m x 1.4m	Ground surface level:	50.39m aOD
	Coordinates (NGR):	449600.669, 196738.185		
Context	Category	Description	Depth (bgl)	
2001	Layer	Made ground. Tarmac	0 - 0.1m	
2002	Layer	Orange sandy gravel, redeposited for made ground	0.1 – 1.4m	

Test Pit WS01	Dimensions :	0.4m diameter x 1.2m	Ground surface level:	50.5m aOD
	Coordinates (NGR):	449592.85, 196746.53		
Context	Category	Description	Depth (bgl)	
3001	Layer	Topsoil. Light brown silty clay loam, granular structure, well mixed	0 - 0.18m	
3002	Layer	Light yellow brown clayey gravel (gravel is fine) redeposited for ground make up	0.18 – 1.2m	

Test Pit WS02	Dimensions :	0.5m x 0.4m x 1.2m	Ground surface level:	50.78m aOD
	Coordinates (NGR):	449615.355, 196727.434		
Context	Category	Description	Depth (bgl)	
4001	Layer	Made ground. Medium grey brown silty clay loam, granular structure, well mixed containing fragments of limestone rubble.	0 – 0.1m	
4002	Layer	Grey brown silty clay with in-situ limestone blocks. Evidence of a pink lime based mortar adhered to some blocks. Blocks appear to be horizontally aligned and may relate to riverside wall or revetment.	0.1 -1.2m	



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Site location and proposed Trial Pits

Figure 1



Plate 1: Observation Pit 01



Plate 2: Observation Pit 02



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Plate 3: Window Sample 01



Plate 4: Window Sample 02

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