



making sense of heritage

42 Kenavon Drive Reading, Berkshire

Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Accession Code: REDMG 2014.23
Planning Reference: 131280
Report Ref: 103240.02
November 2014



**42 Kenavon Drive
Reading, Berkshire**

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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v02	I	KLD (ed)	GSC		17/11/14
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* I = Internal Draft; E = External Draft; F = Final

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Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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42 Kenavon Drive Reading, Berkshire

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Bellway Homes (Thames Valley) Ltd to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks on the site currently known as 42 Kenavon Drive, Reading (National Grid Reference 472704 173645), to satisfy a planning requirement for a the construction of a residential development (reference 131280). The watching brief took place on 27th August and 6th November 2014.

The Site occupies a piece of land on the floodplain of the River Kennet, close to the remains of a known prehistoric palaeochannel and a purported Romano-British river port. The river was canalised in the 18th century, and a branch of the railway was constructed nearby in the 19th century, though the land was still depicted as a river meadow (*King's Mead*) liable to flooding as late as 1879 (Ordnance Survey). Acquired in 1862 by the Reading Gas Company, the Site would have required preparation with regard to flood prevention, in order to make it suitable for the planned gasworks; construction commenced in 1881. The gasworks declined in the 1960s–1970s and was later abandoned and demolished. Recently the Site was subject to a large-scale programme of decontamination comprising the removal and replacement of a fair depth of soils.

The relatively shallow trench depths precluded observations below the imported soils and other overburden, and no natural or archaeological deposits or features were seen. It was not possible to determine whether or not natural and archaeological deposits were affected by the decontamination process.

The remains of a reinforced-concrete structure, probably relating to the main gasworks structure depicted on historic maps, was exposed in Trench 5. The foundations of the gasworks buildings have the potential to be deep and extensive. However, given the riverine nature of the Site it is feasible that the ground level was artificially raised prior to the gasworks installation. Therefore, palaeoenvironmental and archaeological deposits may still be preserved at depth. The groundworks were of insufficient depth to expose any evidence in this regard.

The impact of the gasworks and the decontamination process upon the potential underlying archaeological resource, and the archaeological potential remain *unknown*. The present development is likely to have a minimal impact upon any deposits below the imported material; the potential risk to buried archaeology is considered to be *low*.



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Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Acknowledgements

Wessex Archaeology is grateful to Simon Browne of Bellway Homes (Thames Valley) Ltd, for commissioning them to undertake the watching brief. Graceland Construction is recognised for their co-operation, and the assistance provided by Paul Falcini, Archaeological Officer for the Berkshire Archaeological Service and advisor to Reading Borough Council, is duly acknowledged.

The watching brief was carried out by Benjamin Cullen, who also wrote this report (edited by Kirsten Egging Dinwiddy). The illustrations were prepared by Nancy Dixon. Gareth Chaffey managed the project on behalf of Wessex Archaeology.



42 Kenavon Drive, Reading, Berkshire

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project background

- 1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology (WA) was commissioned by Bellway Homes (Thames Valley) Ltd. to undertake an archaeological watching brief during invasive groundworks at the site currently known as 42 Kenavon Drive, Reading, Berkshire, centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 472704 173645, hereafter referred to as 'the Site' (**Figure 1**).
- 1.1.2 An archaeological desk-based assessment for the Site (WA 2013) was submitted as a supporting document for the Planning Application for 192 dwellings with associated access, parking, landscaping and open spaces (Planning Reference: 131280).
- 1.1.3 A condition was imposed by the Archaeological Officer advising Reading Borough Council which stated that:

'(6) Prior to the commencement of any development, including any works of ground preparation a programme of archaeological work, in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall only take place in accordance with the detailed scheme pursuant to this Condition.'

Reason:

To ensure that any archaeological remains within the site are adequately investigated and recorded, or preserved in situ, in the interest of protecting the archaeological heritage of the Borough.'

- 1.1.4 An archaeological watching brief monitoring all intrusive groundworks extending beyond 1.5m below present ground level was specified as appropriate by the Archaeological Officer advising Reading Borough Council.
- 1.1.5 This document presents the results of the watching brief, which was maintained in accordance with the approved Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) (WA 2014), which conforms (in format and content) with current best practice and guidance outlined in *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* ('MoRPHE', English Heritage 2006) and the Institute for Archaeologist's (IfA) *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (IfA 2008).
- 1.1.6 The watching brief took place on the 27th August and 6th November 2014.

1.2 The Site

- 1.2.1 The Site is situated approximately 1km to the east of the historic core of Reading and the abbey complex, within an area identified as the 'East Side Major Opportunity Area' in the Reading Central Area Action Plan.



- 1.2.2 The Site comprises roughly 2.2 hectares of vacant land bounded to the north by the London-Reading railway line, and to the east by the frame of a former gas holder. The 20th-century residential development fronting Kennet Walk lies to the south, whilst to the west are a number of industrial units.
- 1.2.3 The ground surface is fairly level at c. 37m above Ordnance Datum (aOD). The underlying geology is mapped as Seaford and Newhaven Chalk Formations, overlain by mixed clay, silt, sand and gravel alluvium originating from the River Kennet (British Geological Survey).
- 1.2.4 Removal of contaminated ground from across the whole Site (between 1.9m and 2.4m below the former ground level), and its replacement with layers of remediated soils (1.3m to 1.5m deep), commenced in 2008. The upper 250mm comprises inert engineered crushed concrete, overlaid on geotextile material with the balance constructed in imported sand and gravel.
- 1.2.5 The remediation works were signed off by the Environment Agency in July 2009 and discharged by the Local Planning Authority in September 2009. It is intended that on top of the remediated ground levels that currently exist on Site will be a 600mm capping layer of inert crushed concrete, under hard areas and 600mm of inert subsoil and topsoil under landscaped areas.
- 1.2.1 The foundation design for the development depended upon the building type within each part of the Site. Where piling is utilised, the pile caps (which will be local to blocks A and B only) are likely to extend to 1m in depth and between these caps will be ground beams of 600mm depth below the existing ground levels.
- 1.2.2 Other parts of the Site will utilise either raft foundations or vibro stone columns, all within the remediated soil layers.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Recent archaeological investigations

2.1.1 An archaeological desk-based assessment (DBA) was prepared by WA in 2014 in order to inform the planning process. It concluded that:

- *there were no overriding cultural heritage constraints likely to prohibit development;*
- *the minor adverse impact of the development upon the settings of four Listed Buildings could be ameliorated through design decisions;*
- *there is an archaeological interest within the site in particular relating to features associated with the prehistoric and Roman use of the River Kennet meadows, and any surviving palaeoenvironmental deposits.*

2.1.2 Due to a lack of previous archaeological investigations on the Site itself, it was not possible to accurately assess the impact of the gasworks, or the decontamination processes on the underlying deposits.

2.2 Known archaeology

2.2.1 The DBA includes a comprehensive historical and archaeological appraisal of the Site (WA 2013). A brief summary follows:



Prehistoric

- 2.2.2 Prehistoric activity in the wider vicinity is represented by a wealth of Mesolithic and Neolithic evidence along the edges of watercourses. A palaeochannel demonstrating a similarly dated infilled water channel has been recorded to the west of the Site, and on Gas Works Road to the south-west.

Romano-British

- 2.2.3 Nearby, the site of the later town of Reading is thought to have been a river port for the Roman town at Silchester. Other evidence in the wider region suggests river dredging and bridging work, hinting at as yet unknown settlement within the locale.

Anglo-Saxon and medieval

- 2.2.4 Later documentary evidence demonstrates a continuation of the river port into the Anglo-Saxon and medieval periods, though the immediate area was still heavily influenced by seasonal flooding.
- 2.2.5 In the later medieval period there is little evidence to suggest active land management on and around the Site, despite the prominence of the neighbouring Reading Abbey complex and its associated settlement.

Post-medieval and modern

- 2.2.6 The Site remained unsuitable for occupation throughout the early expansion of the town of Reading. The canalisation of the river Kennet in the 18th century, and then the construction of a branch of the Great Western Railway in the 19th century were hugely influential on the town, and contributed to making the Site more appealing for development.
- 2.2.7 The Site, identified as '*King's Mead liable to flooding*' on 1848 mapping, was purchased by the Reading Gas Company in 1862. Construction of the gasworks commenced in 1881 and by 1899 there were many ancillary structures and railway lines.
- 2.2.8 The gas works reached its peak in the 1930s, featuring many more buildings and three large gas holders. The decline in the 1960s–1970s led to comprehensive demolition, the only surviving structure being a gas holder frame at the eastern end of the Site.
- 2.2.9 Extensive decontamination works to a depth of up to 2.4m have heavily impacted on the known and potential archaeological resource of the Site (see above).

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Aims and objectives

- 3.1.1 The aims of the watching brief were to:

- *determine the presence or absence of archaeological remains, and should they be present, to ensure their preservation by record to the highest possible standard;*
- *confirm the approximate date or date range of the remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence;*
- *determine or confirm the approximate extent of any remains;*
- *determine the condition and state of preservation of the remains;*



- *determine the degree of complexity of the horizontal and/or vertical stratigraphy present; and*
- *prepare a report on the results.*

3.2 Fieldwork methodology

- 3.2.1 The watching brief followed the methodology set out in the WSI (WA 2014), summarised below.
- 3.2.2 The fieldwork comprised the monitoring of excavations extending below c. 1.5m from present ground level. Such excavations occurred in the central and western parts of the Site; elsewhere the foundations were to be constructed on concrete rafts laid upon newly built-up ground, reducing the impact of the development and reducing the necessity for archaeological mitigation.
- 3.2.3 Five trenches (**Figure 1**) relating to development groundworks approached or exceeded the necessary depths were observed. These were mechanically excavated to the required levels.
- 3.2.4 An experienced archaeologist examined the trenches and upcast, and recorded their observations as appropriate and as health and safety requirements allowed.
- 3.2.5 All recording was undertaken using WA's *pro forma* recording sheets and recording system. Details are available on request.
- 3.2.6 A digital photographic record was maintained during the evaluation. Digital images are subject to managed quality control and curation processes which embed appropriate metadata within the image and ensure long term accessibility of the image set.

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 The following section summarises the results of the watching brief. Observations are in the trench summary tables in **Appendix 1** and illustrated by a selection of images (**Plates 1–6**); details are in the archive.

4.2 Natural soil sequence

- 4.2.1 None of the trenches were of sufficient depth to expose any of the natural soil sequence. The presence of concrete rafts in the base of four trenches precluded observation of the bases. These trenches were less than the 1.5m depth required for archaeological supervision, though it was noted that elsewhere on Site up to 0.6m had been removed prior to trenching.

4.3 Other deposits and observations

- 4.3.1 All five trenches revealed a series of made-ground deposits comprising layers of the aforementioned imported material. In Trenches **1-4** these continued beyond the trench bases (1.10m to 1.40m below ground level).
- 4.3.2 The remains of a reinforced-concrete structure (**503**) were identified in Trench **5**. It comprised a 5m x 5m x 0.5m concrete base slab, with two c. 0.3m thick walls surviving to a height of approximately 1m. A broken slab of precast concrete 5m by 5m by 0.3m formed the roof (demolished by the time it was recorded), whilst a section of wall was seen in the southern trench section, underneath the present road. It was not possible to



determine if the structure continues further in this direction, or if it was partially subterranean, or completely free-standing.

4.3.3 The structure coincides with the south-east end of the main gasworks building (**Figure 2**).

4.3.4 Though conditions were not conducive to in-depth investigation, no distinctly natural deposits were observed in Trench 5. Based on the riverine nature of the Site it is feasible that there was element of ground preparation (e.g. made-ground) to alleviate flooding risk prior to the gasworks construction, but the evidence is such that this remains supposition.

5 ARTEFACTUAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

5.1.1 No artefacts were discovered.

5.1.2 No features or deposits suitable for environmental sampling were encountered.

6 DISCUSSION

6.1.1 The shallow trench depths precluded observations below the remediation soils and other overburden. It was not possible to determine whether or not natural and archaeological deposits were affected by the decontamination process.

6.1.2 The results suggest that the foundation and construction cuts for the gasworks buildings have the potential to be deep and extensive. However, given the riverine nature of the Site it is feasible that, as part of a flood defence strategy, the ground level was artificially raised prior to the gasworks installation, in which case palaeoenvironmental and archaeological deposits and features may still be preserved at depth. The groundworks were of insufficient depth to expose any evidence in this regard.

6.1.3 The construction techniques, as presently understood, appear to comprise only limited groundworks that may potentially intrude upon buried archaeological and natural deposits, should they survive below the made-ground.

6.1.4 The impact of the decontamination process and the gasworks on the buried archaeological resource remains unconfirmed. The potential for the survival of archaeological and palaeoenvironmental material is also unknown. Should any be present, and survive, they are likely to be of local to regional significance, potentially associated with prehistoric river-side exploitation, the Romano-British to Anglo-Saxon river port and the development of the town of Reading.

7 STORAGE AND CURATION

7.1 Museum

7.1.1 It is recommended that the project archive resulting from the excavation be deposited with Reading Museum, who has agreed in principle to accept the project archive on completion of the project. Deposition of any finds with the Museum will only be carried out with the full agreement of the landowner.

7.2 Archive

7.2.1 The complete site archive, which will include paper records, photographic records, graphics, artefacts, ecofacts and digital data, will be prepared following the standard conditions for the acceptance of excavated archaeological material by Reading Museum,



and in general following nationally recommended guidelines (SMA 1995; IfA 2009; Brown 2011; ADS 2013).

7.2.2 All archive elements will be marked with the accession code **REDMG: 2014.23**; a full index will be prepared. The physical archive comprises the following:

1 file of paper records and A4 graphics

7.3 Storage

7.3.1 All project archive material will be stored at the WA premises in Salisbury until it is transferred to the Museum.

7.4 Discard policy

8.3.1 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.

7.5 Copyright

7.5.1 The full copyright of the written/illustrative archive relating to the Site will be retained by WA Ltd under the *Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988* with all rights reserved.

7.6 Security Copy

7.6.1 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.

7.7 OASIS

7.7.1 An OASIS online record (<http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/projects/oasis/>) has been initiated for the work (**wessexar1-195588**), with key fields completed on Details, Location and Creators Forms. All appropriate parts of the OASIS online form will be completed for submission to the Gloucestershire Historic Environment Record. This will include an uploaded .pdf version of the entire report (a paper copy will also be included with the archive). A copy of the record is provided in **Appendix 2**.

8 REFERENCES

8.1 Bibliography

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

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9 APPENDICES

9.1 Appendix 1: Trench summary tables

KEY: bgl – below ground level

Trench 1			dimensions (m): c. 8 x 8 x 1.4
context	description		depth bgl (m)
101	layer	made ground; light grey crushed concrete; distinct horizon	0–0.20
102	layer	made ground; dark grey brown clay, abundant subangular and subrounded flint, common subangular brick	0.20–0.80
103	layer	made ground; light yellow brown sand; common subrounded crushed concrete and gravel	0.80–0.95
104	layer	made ground; white clayey chalk	0.95–1.10
105	layer	made ground; light grey silty clay; possibly top of alluvium	1.10+
106	layer	concrete base	1.40+

Trench 2			dimensions (m): c. 8 x 8 x 1.3
context	description		depth bgl (m)
201	layer	made ground; dark grey brown clay, abundant subangular and subrounded flint, common subangular brick	0–0.60
202	layer	made ground; light yellow brown sand; common subrounded crushed concrete and gravel	0.60–0.90
203	layer	made ground; white clayey chalk	0.60–0.90
204	layer	made ground; light reddish brown clay	0.90+
205	structure	concrete base	1.30+

Trench 3			dimensions (m): c. 8 x 8 x 1.1
context	description		depth bgl (m)
301	layer	made ground; dark grey brown clay, abundant subangular and subrounded flint, common subangular brick	0–0.70
302	layer	made ground; light yellow brown sand; common subrounded crushed concrete and gravel	0.70–1.00
303	layer	made ground; dark grey brown sandy clay, common subangular brick fragments	1.00+
304	structure	concrete base	1.10+

Trench 4			dimensions (m): c. 5 x 5 x 1.2
context	description		depth bgl (m)
401	layer	made ground; light grey crushed concrete with terram beneath	0–0.20
402	layer	made ground; dark grey brown clay, abundant subangular and subrounded flint, common subangular brick	0.20–1.00
403	layer	made ground; light yellow brown sand; common gravel	1.00–1.05
404	layer	made ground; dark grey brown sandy clay, common subangular brick fragments	1.05+
405	structure	concrete base	1.20+
406	structure	steel crane base	?

Trench 5			dimensions (m): 8 x 8 x 2.3
context	description		depth bgl (m)
501	layer	made ground; mid brown silty sand, bricks, common subangular stone >0;08m, loose, distinct horizon; terram beneath	0–0.50
502	layer	made ground; dark grey brown silty sand, abundant subangular and subrounded stone >0;08m; loose, distinct horizon	0.50+
503	structure	concrete structure; c. 5m x 5m x 1.8m; roof pushed & pre-cast concrete 0.30m thick; base 0.5m thick; full of railway tracks ?reinforcing concrete slab; water table at base N.B dimensions for 503 are approximate and based on machine operator descriptions; the trench was unsafe to enter	0.50–2.30



9.2 Appendix 2: OASIS form

OASIS ID: wessexar1-195588

Project details

Project name	42 Kenavon Drive, Reading, Berkshire
Short description of the project	<p>Wessex Archaeology undertook a watching brief during groundworks at 42 Kenavon Drive, Reading (NGR 472704 173645), a planning requirement for a residential development. The Site occupies a floodplain of River Kennet, close to a known prehistoric palaeochannel, and purported Romano-British river port. The land was still a river meadow (King's Mead) liable to flooding as late as 1879. Acquired in 1862 by the Reading Gas Company, the Site would have required preparation (flood prevention); gasworks construction commenced in 1881. These declined, were abandoned and demolished in 1970s. Decontamination works required the removal and replacement of a fair depth of soils. The shallow trench depths precluded observations below the imported soils; no natural or archaeological deposits were seen. The remains of a concrete structure, probably relating to the main gasworks structure were exposed. The gasworks foundations have the potential to be deep and extensive. Given the riverine nature of the Site it is feasible that the ground level was artificially raised prior to the gasworks installation. Palaeoenvironmental and archaeological deposits may still be preserved at depth. The impact of the gasworks and the decontamination process upon the potential underlying archaeological resource, and the archaeological potential remain unknown. The present development is likely to have a minimal impact upon any deposits below the imported material; the potential risk to buried archaeology to is considered to be low.</p>
Project dates	Start: 27-08-2014 End: 06-11-2014
Previous/future work	No / No
Any associated project reference codes	103240 - Sitecode
Any associated project reference codes	100470 - Sitecode
Any associated project reference codes	131280 - Planning Application No.
Any associated project reference codes	REDMG: 2014.23 - Museum accession ID
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	None
Current Land use	Industry and Commerce 1 - Industrial
Monument type	STRUCTURE Modern
Significant Finds	NONE None
Methods &	"Annotated Sketch","Documentary Search","Test Pits"



techniques

Development type	Urban residential (e.g. flats, houses, etc.)
Prompt	Planning condition
Position in the planning process	After full determination (eg. As a condition)

Project location

Country	England
Site location	BERKSHIRE READING READING 42 Kenavon Drive
Postcode	RG1 3GD
Study area	2.20 Hectares
Site coordinates	SU 72704 73645 51.4566197494 -0.953463824151 51 27 23 N 000 57 12 W Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 36.00m Max: 38.00m

Project creators

Name of Organisation	Wessex Archaeology
Project brief originator	Bellway Homes (Thames Valley) Ltd
Project design originator	Wessex Archaeology
Project director/manager	Gareth Chaffey
Project supervisor	Ben Cullen
Type of sponsor/funding body	Developer
Name of sponsor/funding body	Bellway Homes (Thames Valley) Ltd

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient	Reading Museum
Physical Archive ID	REDMG: 2014.23
Digital Archive recipient	Reading Museum
Digital Archive ID	REDMG: 2014.23



Digital Media available	"Images raster / digital photography","Text"
Paper Archive recipient	Reading Museum
Paper Archive ID	REDMG: 2014.23
Paper Media available	"Context sheet","Diary","Map","Notebook - Excavation',' Research',' General Notes","Plan","Report","Unpublished Text"

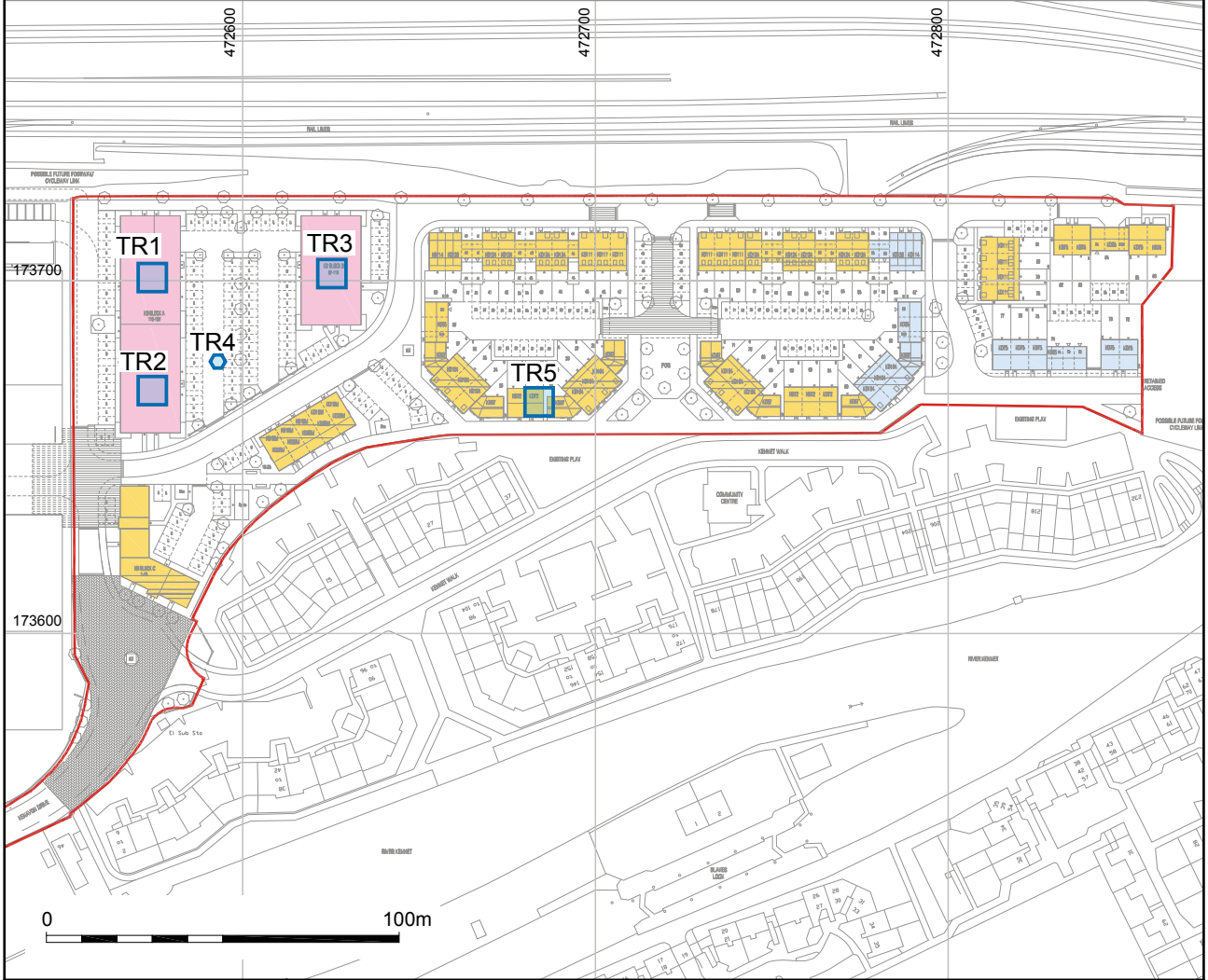
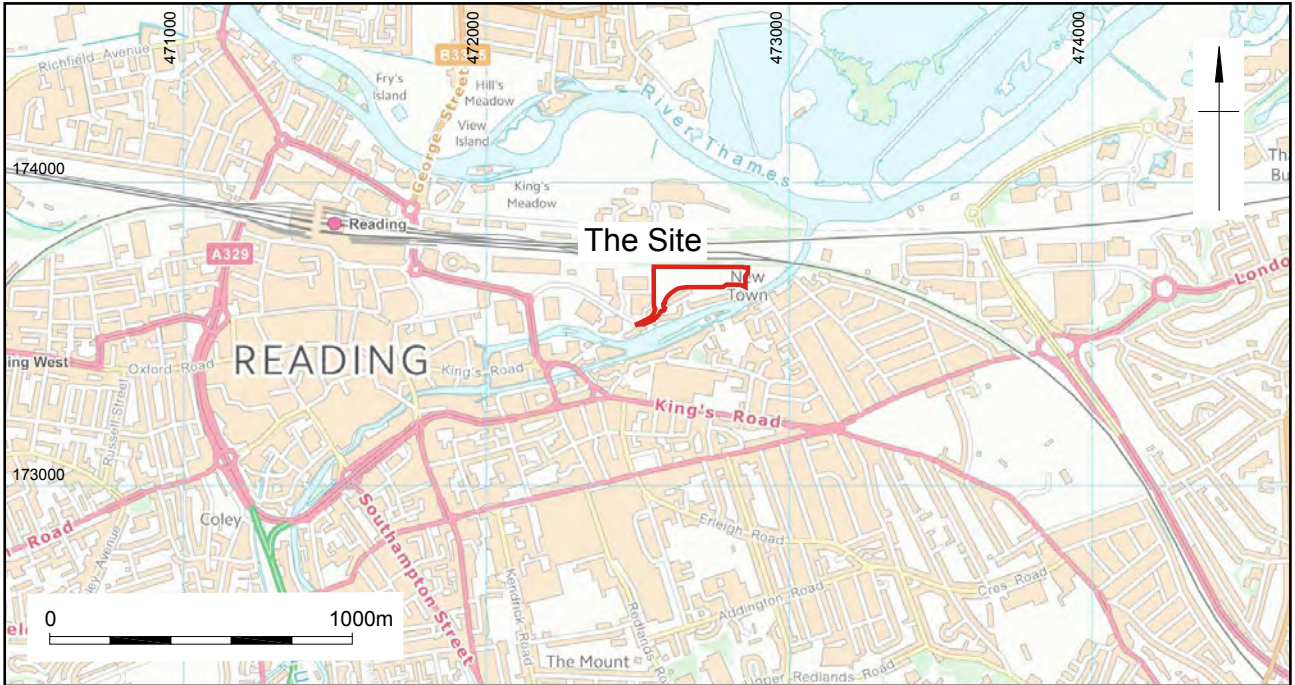
Project bibliography 1

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OASIS:

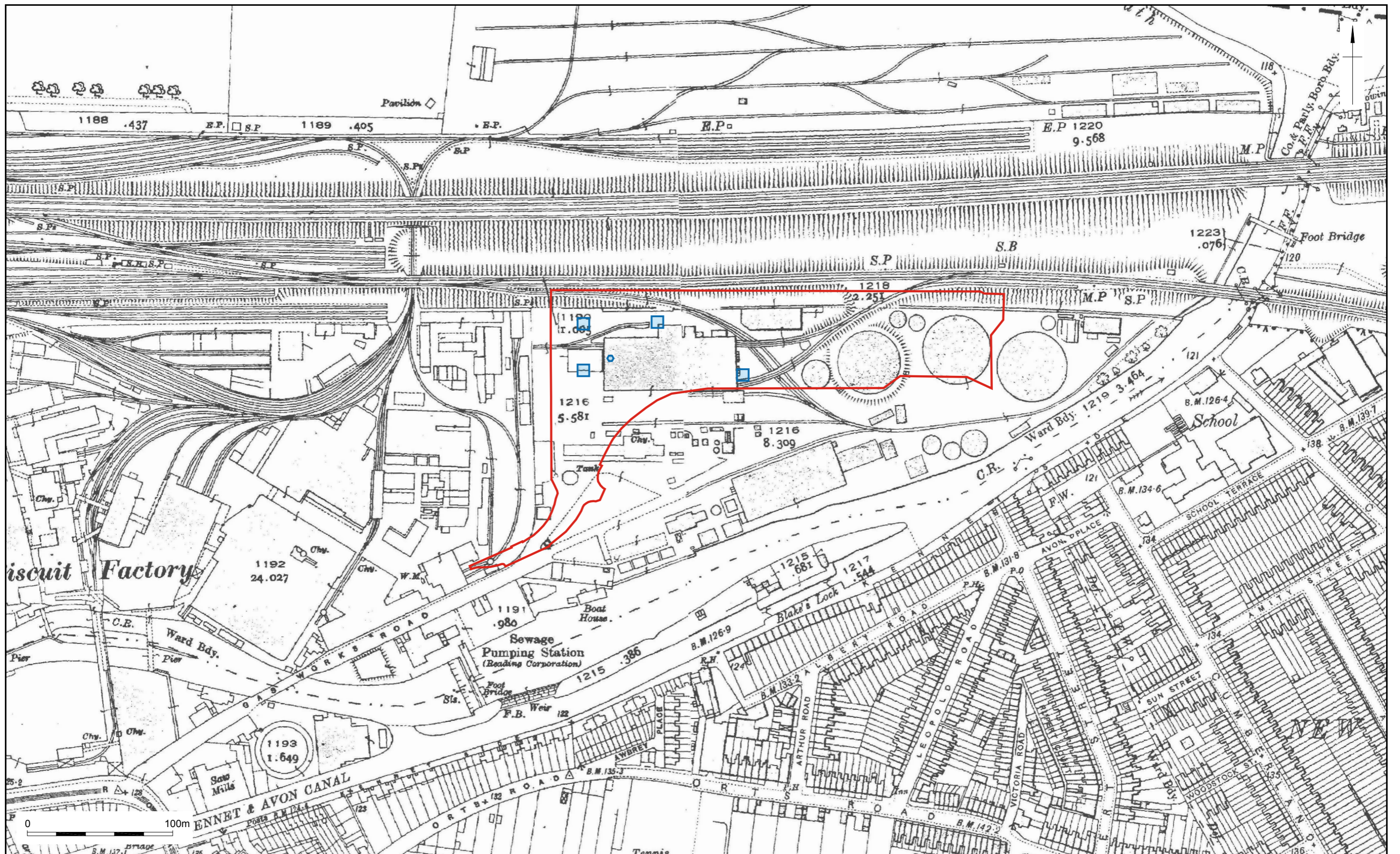
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	Scale:	1:25,000; 1: 2000	Illustrator:	LJC/ND
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Site Location Plan showing approximate locations of trenches

Figure 1



- The Site
- Trenches

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Trench locations in relation to the 1931-4 Ordnance Survey map

Figure 2



Plate 1: South facing section of Trench 1



Plate 2: Trench 1 viewed from the south


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Plate 3: South facing section of Trench 2



Plate 4: South facing section of Trench 3


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Plate 5: South-east facing section of Trench 4



Plate 6: Trench 5 showing remains of structure 503, viewed from the north



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Plate 7: View of the Site



Plate 8: View of the Site

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