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River Avon Restoration Works, Wilsford Wiltshire, SP4 7BP

Archaeological Watching Brief



Ref: 101462.02
December 2015



**River Avon Restoration Works
Wilsford, Wiltshire, SP4 7BP**

Archaeological Watching Brief

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Archaeological Watching Brief

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Archaeological Watching Brief

Summary

A watching brief was maintained during the restoration works on the River Avon at Wilsford, Wiltshire between the 21st September and 23rd October 2015. Material was excavated from the floodplain and used to form berms on meanders in the river. These excavated areas were then allowed to flood to form water meadows.

The 'Shallow Scrape' excavation revealed a stratigraphic sequence consistent with sequential flooding events. A small amount of unabraded Romano-British pottery was recovered from the excavation, suggestive of settlement activity in the immediate vicinity.

A watching brief was maintained during improvement works along the River Avon. The methodology employed by Five Rivers involved creating berms along the meanders in the river with a bottom layer of flint and chert material and topped with soil excavated from the shallow scrape. These operations were recorded photographically and will be included in full in the project archive.



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Acknowledgements

Wessex Archaeology would like to thank Sarah Galsworthy of the Environment Agency for commissioning the work and Jason Lovering and Paul English of Five Rivers for their assistance throughout the watching brief. The fieldwork was monitored on behalf of Wiltshire County Council by Clare King.

The watching brief was undertaken by Marek Lewcun, Dave Murdie and Grace Flood. The report was compiled by Bruce Eaton, who also managed the project on behalf of Wessex Archaeology. The finds were assessed by Rachael Seager Smith. The illustrations were produced by Nancy Dixon.



River Avon Restoration Works Wilsford, Wiltshire, SP4 7BP

Archaeological Watching Brief

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project background

1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology (WA) was commissioned by the Environment Agency (hereafter the 'Client') to undertake an archaeological watching brief during works as part of the river restoration works on the River Avon at Wilsford, Wiltshire, SP4 7BP centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 413348, 139148 (hereafter 'the Site').

1.1.2 Following the Environment Agency's consultation with Wiltshire Council Archaeology Officer Clare King she commented that the area in question is;

'an area of extant bedworks for the watermeadows. These bedworks extend for some distance, so a change of usage in this area does not seem likely to adversely affect the rest of the water meadows from a heritage perspective'.

However she recommended that;

'the area that will be used for the 'scrape' (and any extra areas used for 'borrowing' the material) should be recorded by an archaeologist before construction begins and the construction be monitored by a (archaeological) watching brief to ensure that any historic structures that are revealed are properly recorded'.

1.1.3 The fieldwork was undertaken by Marek Lewcun, Dave Murdie and Grace Flood intermittently between 21st September and 23rd October in accordance with an approved written scheme of investigation (WA 2015).

1.2 The Site

1.2.1 The Site is located to the south of the village of Wilsford and to the north of the village of Great Dunsford, Wiltshire. It is located on the River Avon which meanders in an approximate north to south direction. The Site is situated upon a wider water meadow system. The work comprised of the reinstating of the floodplain to form a shallow scrape into the linear pond at the downstream end of the Site.

1.2.2 The solid geology of the area is mapped as Seaford chalk formation. The superficial deposit is mapped as Alluvium- comprising of Clay, Sand and Gravel. (BGS 2015)

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 The western bank of the River Avon forms the boundary of the Stonehenge and Associated Monuments UNESCO World Heritage Site.



- 2.1.2 Within a 500m radius of the Site there is a high density of Bronze Age barrows, eight of which were excavated in the 19th century, with a further six possible barrows recorded on the Wiltshire Historic Environment Record (WHER). There have also been several Bronze Age finds from the immediate vicinity, including a looped palstave, a flanged axe and an 'urn shaped cup with two pierced ears'.
- 2.1.3 An inhumation was excavated in the advance of the construction of amenities on the western bank of the River Avon. The inhumation had a wooden cover comprising of fourteen loose oak timbers and was radio carbon dated to between the 5th – 6th centuries AD.
- 2.1.4 Earthworks associated with a deserted medieval village (DMV) are located in a triangular block of land west of the River Avon near Lake House. Scheduled.
- 2.1.5 Earthworks associated with the formal and informal gardens of Lake House are still extant. The present gardens were laid out in the early 20th century, although there had previously been an 18th century walled garden at Lake House. The house itself was built in 1578 for George Duke, a wealthy clothier. It was damaged by fire in 1838 and again in 1912, and was repaired and re-built on both occasions.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Aims and objectives

3.1.1 The aims of the watching brief were:

- *to allow, within the resources available, the preservation by record of archaeological deposits, the presence and nature of which could not be established (or established with sufficient accuracy) in advance of development or other potentially disruptive works; including*
 - *To ensure their preservation by record to the highest possible standard;*
 - *To confirm the approximate date or date range of the remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence;*
 - *To determine or confirm the approximate extent of any remains;*
 - *To determine the condition and state of preservation of the remains; and*
 - *To determine the degree of complexity of the horizontal and/or vertical stratigraphy present.*
- *to provide an opportunity, if needed, for the watching archaeologist to signal to all interested parties, before the destruction of the material in question, that an archaeological find has been made for which the resources allocated to the watching brief itself are not sufficient to support treatment to a satisfactory and proper standard; and*
- *To prepare a report on the results of the watching brief.*

3.2 Fieldwork methodology

- 3.2.1 The watching brief was conducted according to the agreed WSI (WA 2015). The monitoring works included a watching brief being undertaken during the removal of material from the 'shallow scrape', the excavation of a test pit, and a photographic record being kept of all operations associated with the improvement works.



3.2.2 All potential features and deposits of possible archaeological origin were partially excavated to ascertain their nature and function and were fully recorded using WA's *pro forma* record sheets. All deposits were assigned a unique number.

3.2.3 A full digital photographic record was maintained which adhered to the National Monuments Records Digital Imaging Guidelines. A full graphic record was maintained. The site drawings were drawn at an appropriate scale, typically 1:10 for sections and 1:20 for plans.

3.3 Monitoring

3.3.1 The project was monitored on behalf of Wiltshire County Council by Assistant County Archaeologist Claire King.

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The following presents a summary of the results of the archaeological watching brief. The results of the watching brief should be read in conjunction with the stratigraphic sequence table in **Appendix 1**. Details of individual contexts and features from the remainder of the watching brief are retained within the site archive.

4.2 Natural deposits and soil sequence

4.2.1 The stratigraphic sequence of natural deposits was consistent in the areas of the Shallow Scrape. The topsoil (**102**) was a blackish grey loam approximately 0.1 m thick. This overlay a whitish grey gritty silt (**103**) approximately 0.3 m thick, and identified as a probable flood deposit. Directly below was a 0.45 m thick layer of very pale grey clay alluvium (**104**). This sealed a dark brown peaty loam (**116**), approximately 0.1 m thick on average, and appears to be a preserved flood plain soil horizon. The horizon between the base of this deposit and (**105**), a blackish grey silty loam approximately 0.8 m thick on average, was very diffuse. Below was a pale grey to mid brown loamy sand with moderate grit inclusions (**106**) approximately 0.25 m thick overlying pale grey river gravels (**107**).

4.3 Archaeological features and deposits

4.3.1 The only features observed were a series of presumably modern drainage ditches running across the flood plan (see **Fig. 2**). These all cut deposit (**103**) and were filled by topsoil (**102**). Of these ditches **108** was the deepest, with the other drainage ditches feeding into it, and contained tall reeds along its length. There was a shallow depression at its south-western end suggesting that the water drained into the River Avon via a pipe or soakaway.

5 ARTEFACTUAL EVIDENCE

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 Only minimal quantities of artefacts were recovered, derived from two of the excavated contexts. All have been quantified by material type and context and the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: All finds by material type and context (number of pieces/weight in grammes)

Feature/deposit	Context	Material	No.	Wt.
-----------------	---------	----------	-----	-----



	104	Ceramic building material	2	98
	105	Pottery	12	48

- 5.1.2 The finds from contexts (104) and (105) suggest that these deposits are of Romano-British date. The two pieces of ceramic building material were both too undiagnostic to assign to a particular brick/tile type, but both were made in an oxidised sandy fabric with red ferrous particles and clay pellets up to 4 mm across. The pottery from context (105) included a small (3g), sherd of Central Gaulish samian, probably from a dish in the form 18/31 series. There was also a plain body sherd in an oxidised sandy fabric and ten sherds of sandy greyware, including rim from a high-shouldered beaker with a short, slightly everted rim and a cordon at the neck/shoulder junction. With the exception of the samian, which is of 2nd century AD date, none of the other sherds were particularly diagnostic, although based on their fabric, a date in the 2nd to 4th centuries AD is the most likely. Although fairly small, all the sherds survived in good, fresh condition and may therefore indicate further *in situ* Roman remains in the vicinity.

6 ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

6.1 Introduction

- 6.1.1 No environmental samples were taken during the watching brief.

7 DISCUSSION

7.1 Summary

- 7.1.1 Although no archaeological features or structures were observed during the watching brief, Romano-British pottery was recovered from the top of deposit (105). These pottery sherds, although small, were unabraded. It is probable that (105) has been formed by sequential flooding events and, as such, the Roman-British pottery has been sealed stratigraphically soon after deposition. The fresh condition of the pottery sherds is consistent with them originating in the immediate vicinity of the Site. The land rising up immediately east of the floodplain would seem a likely candidate for possible settlement activity.

- 7.1.2 A watching brief was maintained during improvement works along the River Avon. The methodology employed by Five Rivers involved creating berms along the meanders in the river with a bottom layer of flint and chert material and topped with soil excavated from the shallow scrape. These operations were recorded photographically and will be included in full in the project archive.

8 STORAGE AND CURATION

8.1 Museum

- 8.1.1 It is recommended that the project archive resulting from the excavation be deposited with **Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum**. Deposition of any finds with the Museum will only be carried out with the full agreement of the landowner.

8.2 Archive

- 8.2.1 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 **Salisbury and**



South Wiltshire Museum, and in general following nationally recommended guidelines (SMA 1995; CIfA 2014b; Brown 2011; ADS 2013).

8.2.2 All archive elements will be marked with the **101462**, and a full index will be prepared. The physical archive comprises the following:

- *01 cardboard boxes or airtight plastic boxes of artefacts & ecofacts, ordered by material type*
- *01 files/document cases of paper records & A4 graphics*

8.3 Discard policy

8.3.1 Wessex Archaeology 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.

8.3.2 The discard of environmental remains and samples follows nationally recommended guidelines (SMA 1993; 1995; English Heritage 2002).

8.4 Copyright

8.4.1 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 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-profitmaking, and conforms to the *Copyright and Related Rights regulations 2003*.

8.5 Security Copy

8.5.1 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.

9 REFERENCES

9.1 Bibliography

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)

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10 APPENDICES

10.1 Appendix 1: Stratigraphic sequence

Stratigraphic Sequence			
context number	context type	description	depth bgl (m)
102	Layer	Topsoil. Blackish dark grey loam.	0 - 0.10m
103	Layer	Whitish grey gritty silt. Probable flood deposit.	0.10 - 0.40m
104	Layer	Very pale grey clay alluvium.	0.40 – 0.85m
116	Layer	Dark brown peaty loam with rare flint chips and frequent preserved roots.	0.85 - 0.95m
105	Layer	Blackish dark grey silty loam with rare nodules of flint.	0.95 – 1.75m
106	Layer	Mixed pale grey to mid brown loamy sand with moderate grit inclusions.	1.75 – 2m
107	Layer	Pale grey gravels with grit and silt. Rapid flooding of excavations on exposure.	2m / limit of excavation
comments	This general sequence was seen across the site and is suggestive of repeated flooding episodes.		



10.2 Appendix 2: OASIS form

10.3 OASIS ID: wessexar1-233361

Project details

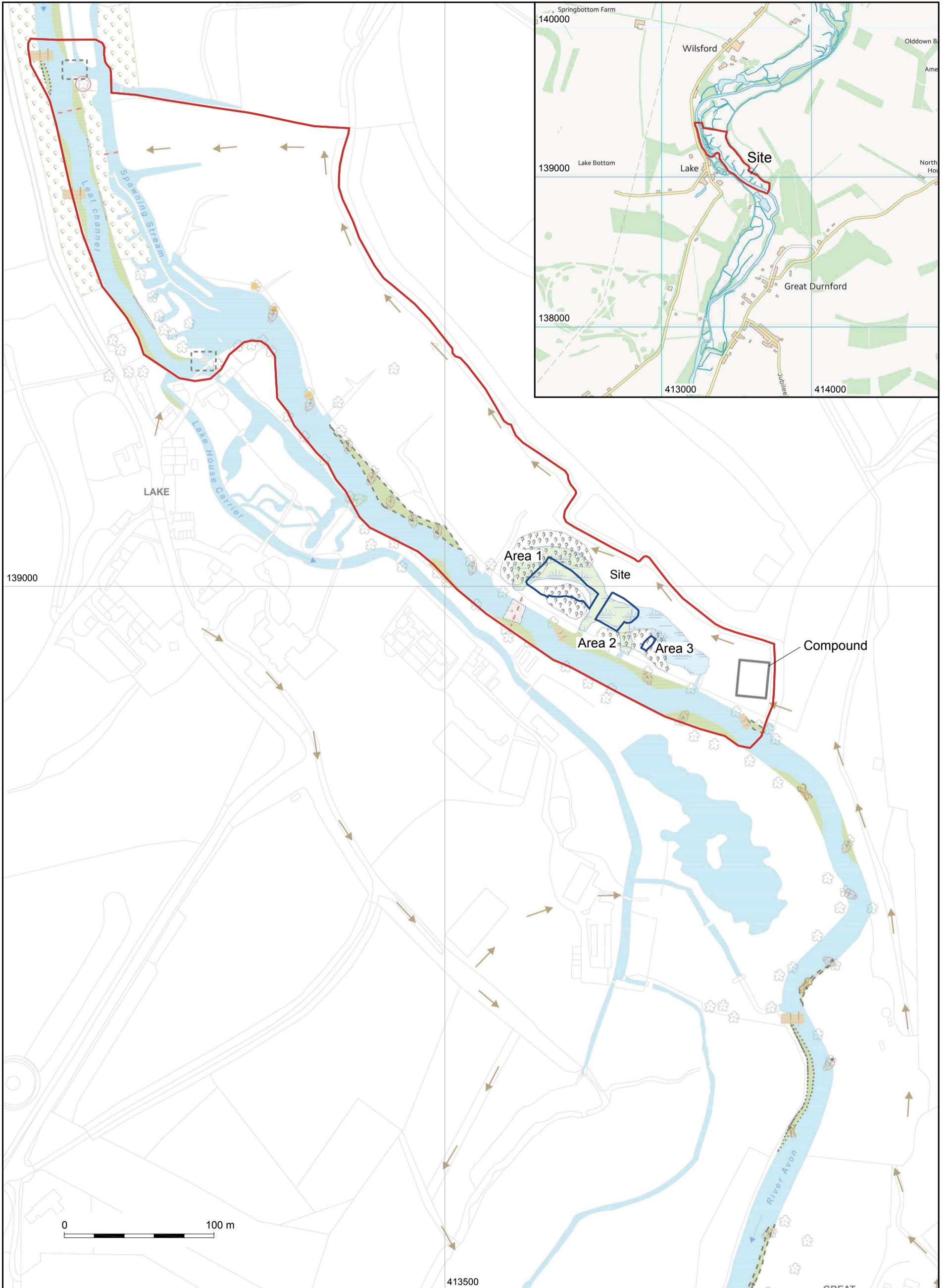
Project name	River Avon Restoration Works, Wilsford, Wiltshire
Short description of the project	A watching brief was maintained during the restoration works on the River Avon at Wilsford, Wiltshire. A photographic record was maintained of the improvement works along the river banks and a watching brief was kept during the excavation of material from the floodplain which was used to form berms. These deposits were indicative of sequential flooding events and a small amount of unabraded Romano-British pottery was recovered.
Project dates	Start: 21-09-2015 End: 23-10-2015
Previous/future work	No / No
Any associated project reference codes	101462 - Contracting Unit No.
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	World Heritage Site
Current Land use	Open Fresh Water 1 - Running water
Significant Finds	POTTERY Roman
Investigation type	"Watching Brief"


Project location

Country	England
Site location	WILTSHIRE SALISBURY WILSFORD CUM LAKE River Avon at Wilsford

Project creators

Name of Organisation	Wessex Archaeology
Project brief originator	Environment Agency
Project design originator	Wessex Archaeology
Project director/manager	Bruce Eaton
Project supervisor	Marek Lewcun
Type of sponsor/funding body	Environment Agency



 Watching Brief area

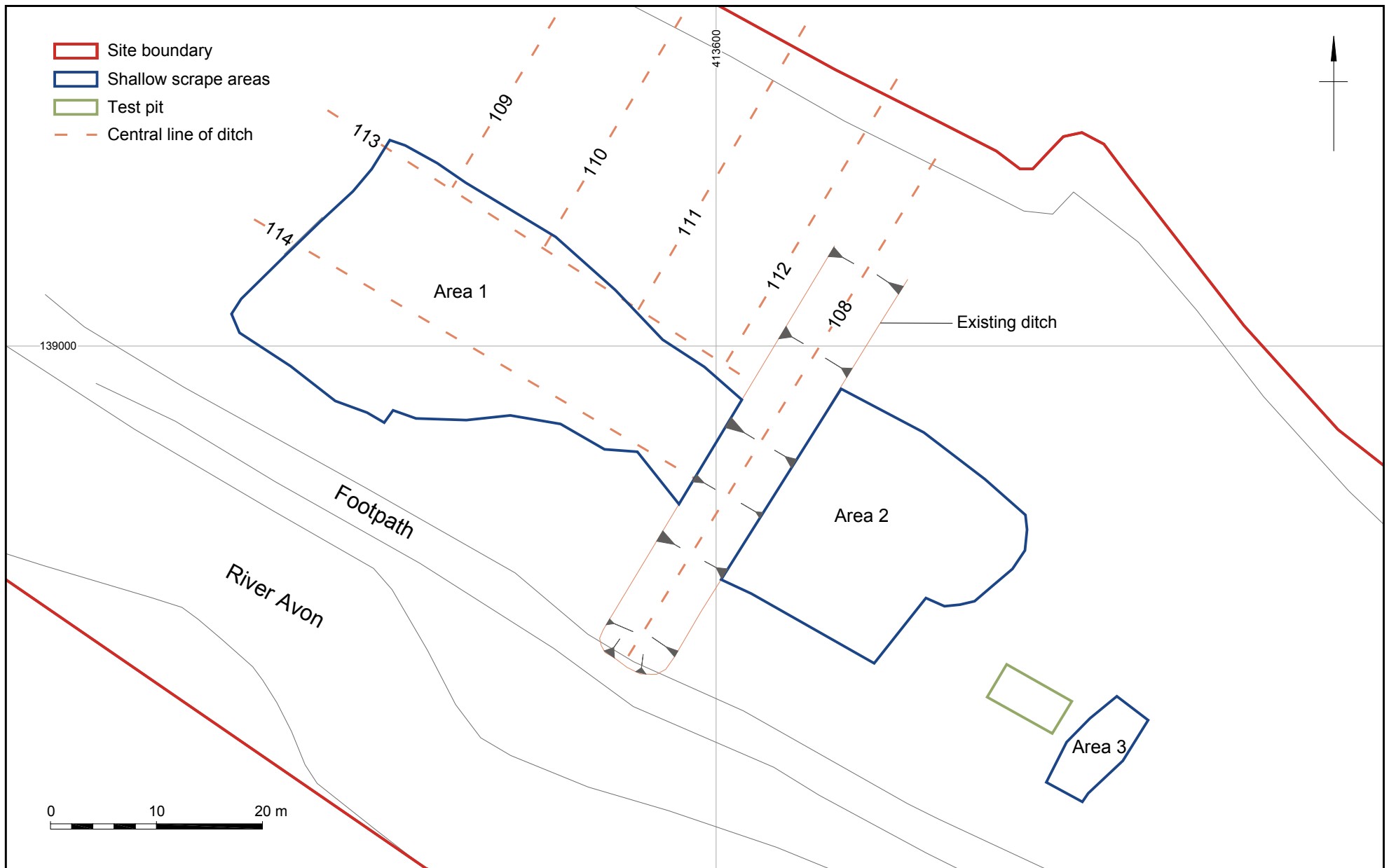


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Site location and monitored works

Figure 1





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Plate 1: Stratigraphic sequence in area of Shallow Scrape



Plate 2: Mechanical excavation of Shallow Scrape

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