



Raghill Farm, Aldermaston, West Berkshire

Initial Statement of Results: Phase 2b



**RAGHILL FARM,
ALDERMASTON, WEST BERKSHIRE**

INITIAL STATEMENT OF RESULTS: PHASE 2b

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Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by S Grundon (Ewelme) Ltd to undertake archaeological strip and record works on land at Raghill Farm, Aldermaston, West Berkshire and centred on NGR 46135 16465. This report covers the results of archaeological fieldwork in the northern half of the Phase 2 area (referred to as Phase 2b) and is part of an ongoing programme of archaeological fieldwork.

The fieldwork identified two late 17th/ early 18th century brick updraught kilns, located at the eastern edge of the stripped area. One of the kilns was in a relatively good condition, while the second kiln had been largely robbed.

A large post-medieval field boundary, orientated northeast/southwest, was also uncovered, which ran along the eastern extent of the proposed extraction area. This boundary has already been previously traced and investigated in other strip and record areas (Phases 1 and 2a). Within the Phase 2b area, this boundary was associated with a second parallel ditch, which together formed a narrow trackway, which may be associated with the kilns.

Within the remainder of the area, no evidence of archaeological activity was identified.

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Mike Dinwiddy, Andy Armstrong, Graciela Hernandez and Dave Murdie undertook the fieldwork. Mike Dinwiddy and Andrew Manning compiled this report, with the illustrations prepared by Matthew McMurray, environmental assessment was undertaken by Hayley Clark, Sarah Wyles and Chris Stevens and finds by Lorraine Mephram and Bob Hill. The project was managed by Andrew Manning on behalf of Wessex Archaeology.

RAGHILL FARM, ALDERMASTON, WEST BERKSHIRE

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

- 1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by S Grundon (Ewelme) Ltd to conduct an archaeological strip and record work on land at Raghill Farm, Aldermaston, West Berkshire and centred on NGR 46130 16455, hereafter referred to as ‘the Site’ (**Figure 1**).
- 1.1.2 The 29ha site at Raghill Farm was granted planning permission for the extraction of sand and gravel in 2002. This process will be undertaken in nine phases over a seven-year period. As a condition of the planning permission, archaeological ‘strip and record’ will be undertaken, together with further mitigation, if required, before the extraction of sand and gravel.
- 1.1.3 The methodology to be used in the archaeological fieldwork is set out in the Written Scheme of Investigation and Recording (Wessex Archaeology 2002), which was approved by the West Berkshire Heritage Service, prior to the commencement of the first stage of works.
- 1.1.4 Archaeological fieldwork on the Phase 1 area (Phase 1a) was undertaken in October/November 2002, with a subsequent watching brief along the eastern edge of the Phase 1 area in April 2003 (Wessex Archaeology 2003a and 2003b). Phase 1b was undertaken in May/June 2004 (Wessex Archaeology 2004a). Phase 2a to the northeast was carried out during October/November 2004 (Wessex Archaeology 2004b).
- 1.1.5 This report presents the results of the strip and record fieldwork on the northern section of the Phase 2 area (Phase 2b), which was carried out between the 7th March to 6th April 2005. It is intended that on completion of the final phase of works, an assessment report will be produced, containing an overall assessment of the archaeological results for the entire Site.

1.2 The Site

- 1.2.1 The Phase 2b area was located at the northern end of the south-eastern side of the proposed quarry site and lay approximately 150m to the north of the previously investigated Phase 1b area (**Figure 1**). This phase of the work (Phase 3) covered an area of approximately 1ha at a height of approximately 98m above Ordnance Datum (aOD), sloping down to 94m aOD adjacent to a small stream, located just beyond the eastern extent of the Site.

- 1.2.2 Plateau gravel was evident across the Phase 2b area, with clays and sands more in evidence along the eastern boundaries of the Site. The area along the eastern edge of the Phase 2b area adjacent to the stream is not proposed for extraction and therefore was not stripped (**Figure 2**).

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1.1 A detailed review of the archaeological and historical background of the 29ha site and surrounding area was submitted in the form of a desk-based assessment (Wessex Archaeology 2001). This identified a number of historic boundaries and flint findspots within the Raghill Farm site. Overall, the potential for significant archaeological remains was considered to be small.
- 2.1.2 The first phase of fieldwork was undertaken in 2003 in the south-western half of the Phase 1 area, which was stripped under archaeological supervision. A small number of archaeological features, including a hearth and thirteen small pits/postholes, mainly concentrated within two clusters, were uncovered in the southwestern area of the Phase 1 area and were subsequently excavated (**Figure 1**) (Wessex Archaeology 2003a).
- 2.1.3 Most of the features were badly truncated, but a small quantity of Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age pottery was recovered from four of the features. A ditch, which ran across the area, proved to be post-medieval in date.
- 2.1.4 Early in the following year, a watching brief was also undertaken at the eastern limits of the Phase 1 area, although this did not uncover any significant archaeological features (Wessex Archaeology 2003a). As part of the Phase 1 works, a field boundary survey and evaluation was also undertaken on a historic hedgerow boundary along the south-western edge of the Phase 1 area (Wessex Archaeology 2003b).
- 2.1.5 The Phase 1b fieldwork did not find any significant archaeological features. A number of tree throws and boles were identified but appeared to be modern in date. A continuation of the post-medieval boundary exposed in Phase 1a was also recorded. A single Neolithic flint blade was recovered during stripping (Wessex Archaeology 2004a).
- 2.1.6 Fieldwork within the Phase 2a area exposed three post-medieval boundary ditches, which form a continuation of the ditches discovered in phase 1a, two on a north/south orientation and one joining the others on an east/west orientation.

3 METHODOLOGY

- 3.1.1 The aim of the fieldwork was to determine as far as possible the significance and quantity of any surviving archaeological remains within the proposed quarry area and to mitigate the impact of the proposed development on the archaeological resource by ensuring its preservation by record.
- 3.1.2 The Phase 2a area was stripped of topsoil using 360°-tracked mechanical excavators under constant archaeological supervision. All features, archaeological or otherwise were recorded in plan using a Total Station Theodolite (TST) and located within the National Grid.
- 3.1.3 Two 10 litre samples were taken from the flue and primary fill of Kiln 1243. These samples were taken as part of the assessment of the nature and function of the kiln and to collect possible fuel residues. No samples were taken from the heavily disturbed Kiln 1226.

4 RESULTS

General

- 4.1.1 Initial examination of the stripped Phase 2b area revealed a total of approximately fifty small discrete features, spread through the area, together with three boundary/trackway ditches and two brick kilns (**Figure 2**).

Discrete features

- 4.1.2 A large sample of the discrete features was excavated. No evidence for archaeological activity was identified, all of the features proving to be former tree-boles or of other natural origin.

Boundary ditches

- 4.1.3 Three ditches were identified within the Phase 2b stripped area. The largest of the ditches (**1208**), 2-4m in width and between 0.3-0.4m in depth, was orientated northeast/southwest and ran along the eastern extent of the proposed extraction area (**Figure 2**). This feature is a continuation of a boundary found in Phase 1 and Phase 2a areas. Although no datable material was recovered from excavation in the Phase 2b area, a section through this boundary in the Phase 1a area produced post-medieval and modern material (Wessex Archaeology 2003a, ditch 1070).
- 4.1.4 A second undated ditch **1207**, almost identical in size, ran parallel to the northern half of ditch **1208**, with a narrow gap between them of at most 2.1m. Both ditches continuing northwards, beyond the extent of the stripped area.
- 4.1.5 The terminus of a third boundary ditch **1196**, 1m in width and 0.1m in depth was identified in the south-east of the area, with the ditch continuing beyond

the eastern limits of the area. This ditch was perpendicular to ditch **1208**, with a 9m gap between the two features.

Late 17th/Early 18th century brick kilns

- 4.1.6 During stripping at the north-eastern edge of the Phase 2b area, two large irregular features were cut into the edge of the gravel terrace and located immediately to the east of the two parallel ditches **1207** and **1208**. On further investigation, both features proved to be substantial brick-built updraught brick kilns (**1243** and **1226**) (**Figures 3** and **4**). Bricks recovered from both kilns have been dated by their general typology to the late 17th or early 18th century.

Kiln 1243

- 4.1.7 Kiln 1243 was the southernmost of the two kilns and the best-preserved (**Figure 3**). The kiln was oval in plan, 2.9m by 2.4m and approximately 1m in depth. The wall of the kiln consisted of mortared hand-made bricks, two courses wide and at least 14 courses high in the best preserved section. The interior face of many of the bricks showed heavy vitrification.
- 4.1.8 At the base of the kiln wall and extending into the interior of the kiln was a rough brick platform or walkway, 0.5m wide, which ran around the inside edge of the structure. Extending at least 1m eastwards from the kiln was a brick-lined flue, approximately 0.6m in width. No surviving evidence for kiln furniture or a supporting central structure was evident in the center of the kiln, the base of the kiln resting on the bare gravel natural.
- 4.1.9 The primary fills of the kiln were remarkable clean, with no significant deposits of charcoal being noted during excavation. Two 10 litre samples from the primary fill of the kiln and the flue were taken and assessed. Neither of the samples contained any significant quantities of charred plant remains. The primary fills of the kiln and flue (**1240** and **1242**) contained large quantities of complete bricks, probably relating to the collapsed structure, which were subsequently sealed by a series of relatively clean clay silt fills (**1237-1239**).
- 4.1.10 The absence of significant deposits of charcoal or other fuel residues, usually associated with this type of kiln, may suggest that the kiln was cleaned after its last use, or at least any charcoal deposits were subsequently broken down and washed out. There was no evidence for any substantial robbing of the structure and it is likely that after a period of disuse, the kiln collapsed and was gradually in-filled.

Kiln 1226

- 4.1.11 This kiln measured approximately 6m by 4m and 1.4m in depth and was twice the size of Kiln 1243. A sample excavation of this kiln indicated that the majority of the brick structure had been removed, with only part of the brick platform or walkway at the base of the kiln surviving (**Figure 4**). Once

the structure of the kiln had been robbed, the kiln appeared to have been rapidly backfilled.

5 FINDS

5.1.1 Finds recovered during fieldwork comprise ceramic building material relating to the two brick kilns uncovered. This included two complete bricks (Kiln **1243**: contexts **1209** and **1242**), six further fragments (Kiln **1226**: context **1227** and Kiln **1243**: context **1240**), as well as some very heavily vitrified and heat-distorted ceramic material (Kiln **1243**: context **1237**).

5.1.2 All of the bricks are unfroged types, and the whole examples fall within the size range of 230-45mm (9-9½ inches) in length by 100-120mm (4-4¾ inches) in width, by 55mm (2¼ inches) thick. As well as the heavily vitrified fragments from **1237**, most of the other bricks have the appearance of overfiring, leading to partial vitrification of surfaces. Brick type and size suggest a date range in the late 17th or early 18th century.

6 ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 The bulk samples were processed by standard flotation methods; the flot retained on a 0.5mm mesh and the residues fractionated into 5.6mm, 2mm, 1mm and 0.5mm fractions and dried. The coarse fractions (>5.6 mm) were sorted, weighed and discarded. The residues were all examined for slag and hammerscale. No slag was recovered and only very small amounts of hammerscale that probably represents residual or background material.

6.1.2 The flots were scanned under a x10 - x30 stereo-binocular microscope and presence of charred remains quantified (**Table 1**), to record the preservation and nature of the charred plant and charcoal remains.

6.1.3 The samples consisted almost entirely of roots with a several probable modern seeds of elder (*Sambucus nigra*). The samples also contained a high number of probable modern fungal sclerotia (spores). While these have been recorded as charred it is notable that modern fungal sclerotia of *Coenococcum geophilum* often have such an appearance.

6.2 Charred plant remains

6.2.1 No identifiable charred plant remains were recovered.

6.3 Charcoal

6.3.1 Charcoal was noted from the flots of the bulk samples and is recorded in **Table 1**. In general very little charcoal was recovered. However, it is possible given the degree of root disturbance and the ease with which wood charcoal breaks down that any present may have been broken down and subsequently lost with water through the soil profile.

Table 1. Assessment of the charred plant remains and charcoal

Feature type/ no	Context	Sample	size litres	Flot							Residue	
				flot ml	size	Grain	Chaff	Weed seeds uncharred charred	Charcoal >5.6mm	Other	Charcoal >5.6mm	analysis
17th/18th century Kiln 1243												
chamber	1239	305	10	40 ⁴⁰	-	-	b	-	-	-	-	
flue	1241	306	10	35 ³⁵	-	-	c	-	-	-	-	

KEY: A** = exceptional, A* = 30+ items, A = ≥10 items, B = 9 - 5 items, C = < 5 items, (h) = hazelnuts, smb = small mammal bones; Moll-t = terrestrial molluscs Moll-f = freshwater molluscs; Analysis, C = charcoal, P = plant, M = molluscs

NOTE: ¹flot is total, but flot in superscript = ml of rooty material. ²Unburnt seed in lower case to distinguish from charred remains

6.3.2 The samples do not add anything to what is known about the function or purpose of the kiln. It is possible that wood charcoal if once present has since been broken down. As such any indications of burning must come from the feature itself. Evidence of coal, slag and/or charred cereals if once present would be expected to have survived unless the kiln was thoroughly cleaned out.

7 DISCUSSION

7.1.1 The results of the archaeological strip and record on the Phase 2b area found no evidence for any archaeological activity predating the post-medieval period. A number of tree-boles were identified and investigated, all of which related to modern clearance. The machine driver, who has lived locally for the last 65 years, recalled that a large fire had broken out within woodland on the Raghill Farm site in the late 1940s. He also related that the area was subsequently cleared by bulldozer. This is consistent with the results from this and previous phases of fieldwork.

7.1.2 Ditch **1208**, which has already been uncovered in previous fieldwork, and the other ditches **1196** and **1207** clearly relate to features shown on Ordnance Survey 6" 1st Edition map of 1882 (and possibly on earlier historical maps) as partitions within the plantation, that covered the majority of the Site (Wessex Archaeology 2001).

7.1.3 The Desk-based Assessment did list a known brick kiln in Roundwood Copse, located approximately 1km to the south of the Raghill farm site (Wessex Archaeology 2001, WA32). The discovery of two new kilns on the edge of the Phase 2b area was unexpected, although the kilns are in a prime

location, less than a few hundred metres from a pocket of London Clay, which lies to the north-east beyond the Site boundary, and a nearby stream to enable the processing of the raw clay.

7.1.4 Although well-preserved post-medieval brick kilns in Berkshire and Hampshire are relatively rare, similar kilns, both in date and morphology, have been recently uncovered at Dogmersfield Park, Hartley Wintney, Hampshire, less than 15km to the east of Raghill Farm (Wessex Archaeology 2003c). Records exist, which link these kilns to small-scale building work at the main house within the Dogmersfield Park Estate in the period up to 1725.

7.1.5 As noted in the final report;

Owners of big estates in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, who wished to alter or extend their houses, were faced with two alternatives when a fresh supply of bricks was required. Either they could purchase them from one of the yards in the neighbourhood, or employ a local brickmaker for a limited period to make the necessary bricks in a kiln built, or re-built, for the purpose in fairly close proximity to the house (Wessex Archaeology 2003c, 24)

7.1.6 It is possible, although impossible to prove at this stage, that the two kilns at Raghill Farm may have been intended for small scale brick production associated with the main house within the Aldermaston Park Estate, which during the 18th century owned land adjacent to the present Site. The original Aldermaston Court was destroyed by fire in 1836.

7.1.7 The parallel ditches **1207** and **1208** to the north of the kilns form part of a relatively narrow trackway, which may have been used for the transport of the finished bricks to their final destination. The kilns therefore offer some potential insight into the workings of the Aldermaston estate in the late 17th and early 18th century, although further work will be required during the assessment stage.

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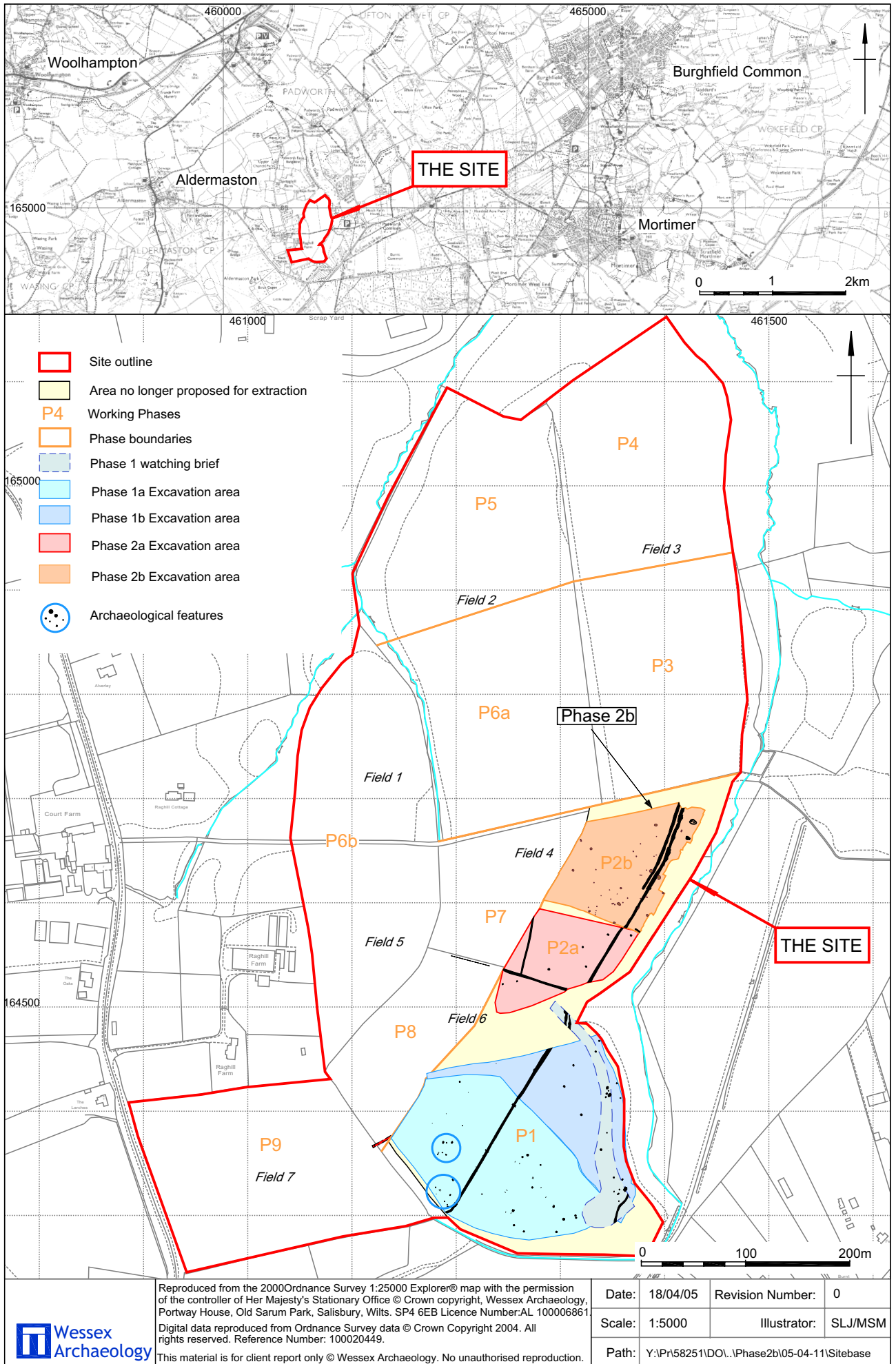
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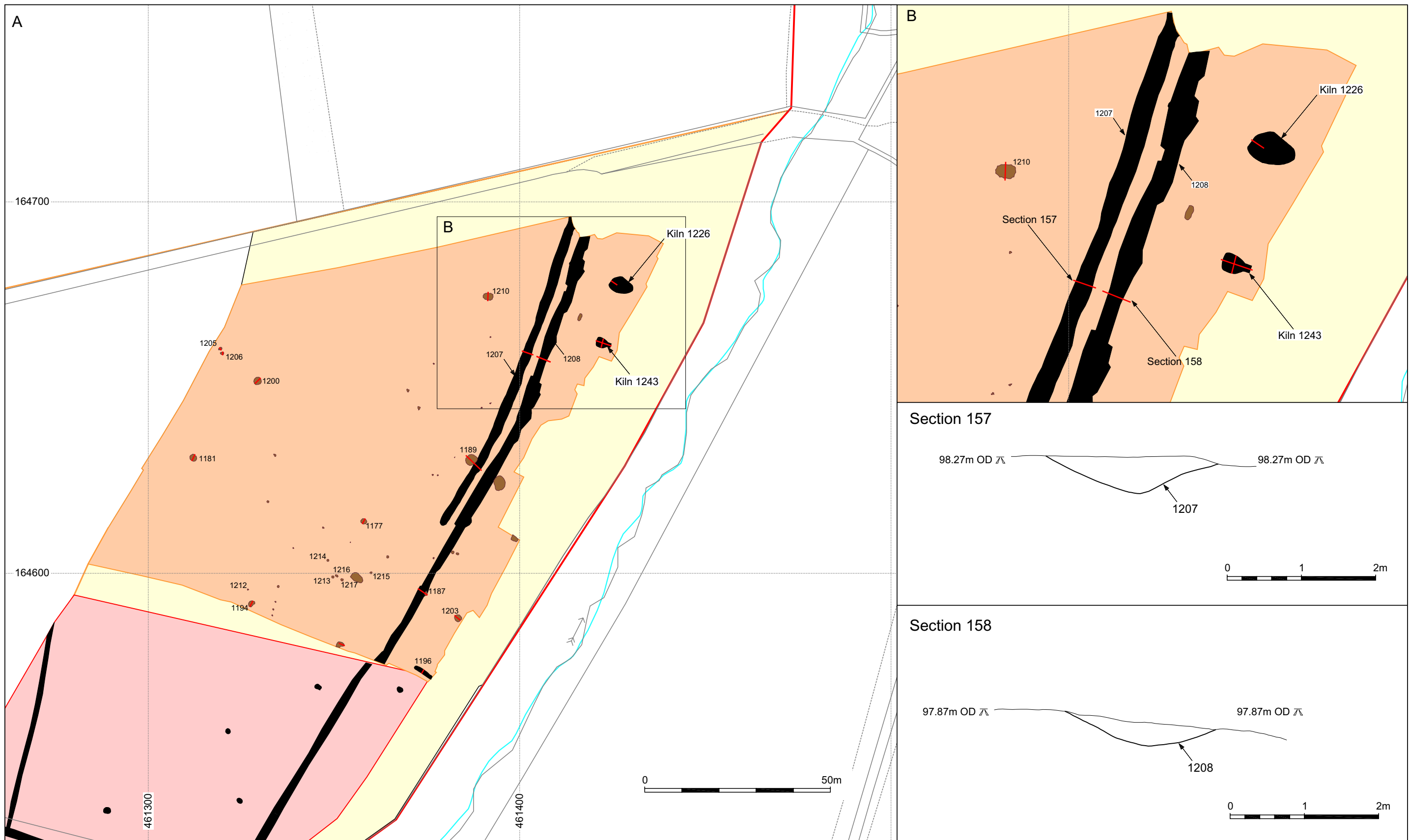
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Location of Raghill Farm and Phase 2b area

Figure 1



- Archaeological features
- Tree throws
- Section lines
- Area no longer proposed for extraction
- Phase 2a Excavation area
- Phase 2b Excavation area



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Phase 2b: Overall Plan

Figure 2

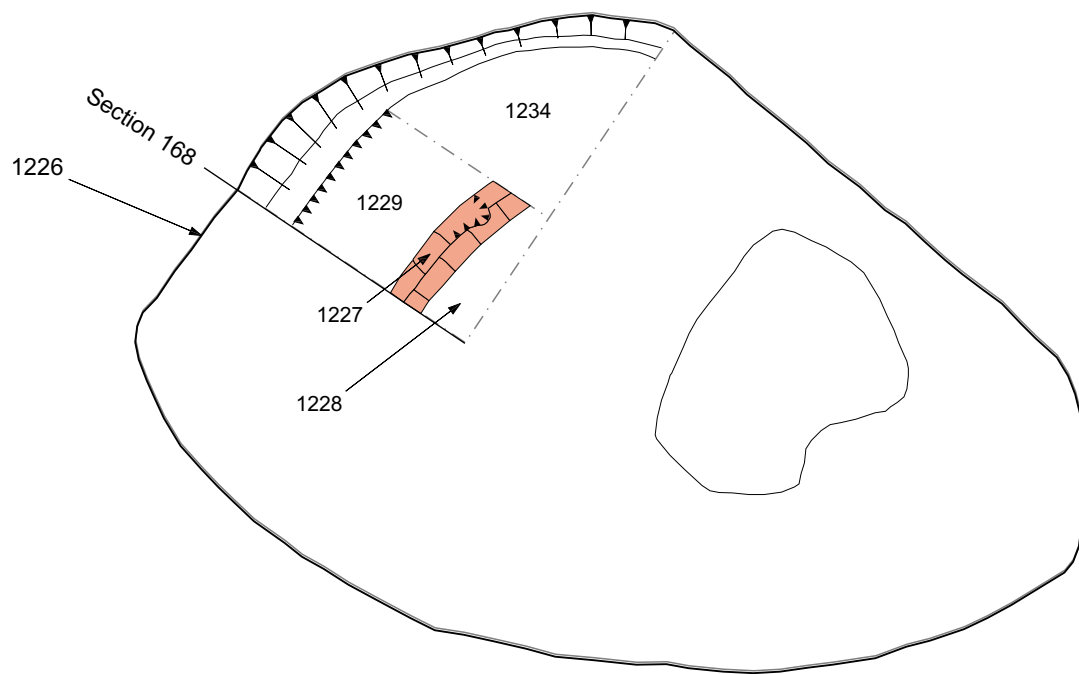


- Brick
- Degraded brick
- Slag
- Flint gravel

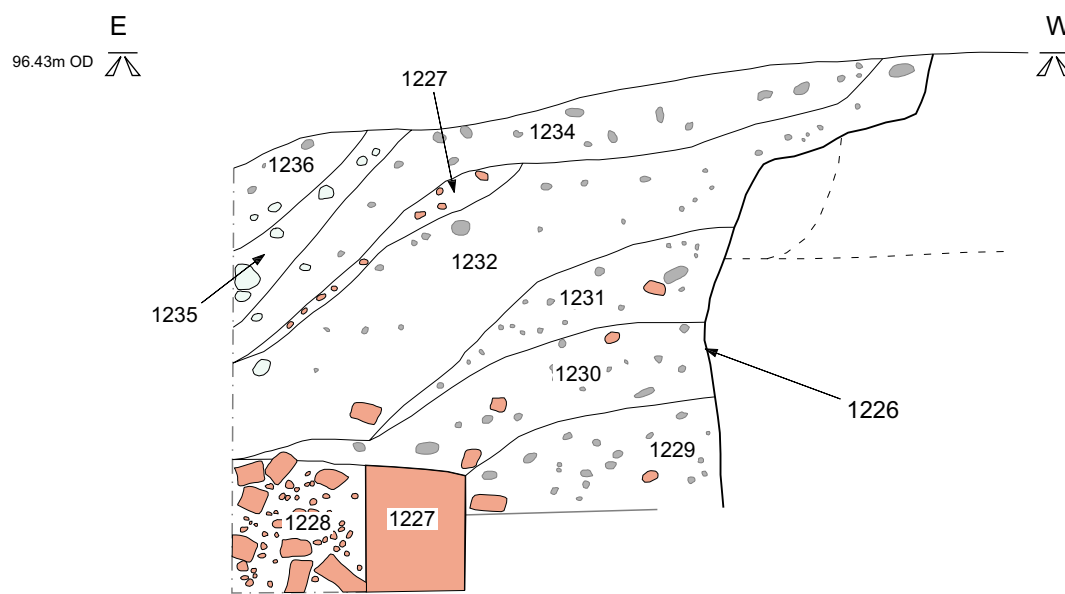





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Section 168



-  Brick
-  Chalk
-  Flint gravel



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Kiln 1226: Plan and Section

Figure 4



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