STATION HILL AND FRIARS WALK, FRIAR STREET, READING, BERKSHIRE.

NGR: SU 7136 7375

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

PHASE ONE

August 2009 Report No. 659

Quality Assurance

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SUMMARY

In August 2009 Foundations Archaeology undertook a programme of archaeological evaluation on land at Station Hill and Friars Walk, Friar Street, Reading, Berkshire (NGR: SU 7136 7375). The project was commissioned by Ioana Wiggins of Horstonbridge Limited on behalf of Jon Homan of Sackville Property Management Limited.

In advance of proposed redevelopment of the Site, a programme of pre-determination archaeological work was required by Berkshire Archaeology, the archaeological advisors to Berkshire County Council, in order to inform the proposed planning permission.

The current project constituted Phase 1 of a programme of evaluation, which required the excavation and recording of 65 linear metres of trenching, along with a test pit. In the event, it was not possible to excavate the test pit and Trench 4 also needed to be reduced in length from 15m to 6.5m due to spatial constraints. Due to Health and Safety concerns relating to the depth of modern overburden, a number of sondages were excavated within the trenches to allow sight of the natural ground..

A Medieval or Post-Medieval feature was present in Trench 1 and two layers, likely to be of similar date, in Trench 4. Trenches 2 and 3 yielded a sequence of Modern deposits, which directly overlaid 'natural' clay.

It was possible to determine the depth of demonstrably Modern impact and the depth of sand/gravel and/or clay deposits in all of the excavated trenches, although the restricted sample size may mean that this is not representative of the overall Site area.

The data from the project will inform the mitigation of any future demolition or enabling works and will enhance the project design for the post-demolition Phase 2 archaeological evaluation.

GLOSSARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Archaeology

For the purpose of this project, archaeology is taken to mean the study of past human societies through their material remains from prehistoric times to the Modern era. No rigid upper date limit has been set, but AD 1900 is used as a general cut-off point.

CBM

Ceramic Building Material.

Medieval

The period between AD 1066 and AD 1500.

Natural

In archaeological terms this refers to the undisturbed natural geology of a site, in this case River Terrace Gravel over Upper Chalk.

NGR

National Grid Reference from the Ordnance Survey Grid.

OD

Ordnance datum; used to express a given height above sea-level. (AOD Above Ordnance Datum).

OS

Ordnance Survey.

Post-medieval

The period between AD 1500 and AD 1900.

Prehistoric

The period prior to the Roman invasion of AD 43. Traditionally sub-divided into; *Palaeolithic* -c. 500,000 BC to c. 12,000 BC; *Mesolithic* -c. 12,000 BC to c. 4,500 BC; *Neolithic* -c. 4,500 BC to c. 2,000 BC; *Bronze Age* -c. 2,000 BC to c. 800 BC; *Iron Age* -c. 800 BC to AD 43.

Roman

The period traditionally dated AD 43 until AD 410.

Saxon

The period between AD 410 and AD 1066.

Sondage

A trial bore or excavation.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of an archaeological evaluation undertaken by Foundations Archaeology in August 2009 on land at Station Hill and Friars Walk, Friar Street, Reading, Berkshire (NGR: SU 7136 7375). The evaluation was commissioned by Ioana Wiggins of Horstonbridge Limited on behalf of Jon Homan of Sackville Property Management Limited.
- 1.2 In advance of proposed redevelopment of the Site, a programme of predetermination archaeological work was required by Berkshire Archaeology, the archaeological advisors to Berkshire County Council, in order to inform the proposed planning permission.
- 1.3 The project was undertaken in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI), prepared by Foundations Archaeology (2009), which was approved by Mary O'Donoghue of Berkshire Archaeology. The fieldwork was undertaken in accordance with IfA *Standards and Guidance on Archaeological Evaluation* (1994, revised 2001) and *General Standards for Fieldwork Projects* (Berkshire Archaeology n.d.).
- 1.4 This report constitutes the results of the archaeological works. The code of conduct of the Institute for Archaeologists was adhered to throughout.

2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

- 2.1 It is proposed to undertake a new development on land at Station Hill and Friars Walk, Friar Street, Reading. The site covers an area of approximately 2.56ha centred on NGR: SU 7136 7375. A multi storey car park, bus station & former Mecca bingo hall, as well as a number of commercial and office buildings presently occupy the Station Hill area, with a derelict commercial centre occupying the Friars Walk site. The proposed development involves the demolition of the existing buildings and the construction of new buildings for a mix of uses.
- 2.2 The geological sequence within the site area consists of River Terrace Gravel over Upper Chalk. In places alluvium may survive over the gravels. Modern deposits, including made ground of 19th-20th century date will comprise the latest element in the stratigraphic sequence.
- 2.3 The Site has previously been the subject of a desk-based archaeological assessment, which has indicated that the Station Hill area lies outside the Saxon, Medieval and early Post-medieval town and has a generally low potential for Prehistoric and Roman features. It is possible that fortifications of Viking age date are present in the vicinity. Any such remains would be considered to be of high archaeological significance. Geotechnical investigations undertaken at 21 Greyfriars Road in 1910 and at Vincents Garage in 1927 suggested that there had been little deep disturbance in this part of the Site, indicating that any surviving remains may be well preserved.

- However, the impact of previous and existing buildings on the site remains an unknown quantity.
- 2.4 The Friars Walk area of the site also probably lies outside the extent of the Saxon town. Archaeological excavations between 2003 and 2005 at 25-26 Friar Street and Shoesmiths Court, now the site of the Novotel Hotel, identified both Medieval and Post-medieval finds and features, including the likely remains of the 17th century Civil War defences. These results indicated that the greater part of the area between Friar Street and Garrard Street is included within the Medieval and Post-medieval town limits, although the exact northern extent of these limits remains unknown. The terracing of the natural hillside to create basements for the existing Friars Walk shopping centre will have had a significant impact on any archaeological deposits, with the best preservation on the Friars Street frontage and on the southern side of Garrard Street.
- 2.5 The site, therefore, is situated within an area of known archaeology and contains the potential for the preservation of archaeological deposits. In particular the site may contain information relating to Viking, Medieval and Post-medieval settlement and the 17th century Civil War defences. This did not prejudice the works against the recovery of evidence dating to other periods.

3 AIMS

- 3.1 The aims of the evaluation are to gather high quality data from the direct observation of archaeological deposits in order to provide sufficient information to establish the location, date, character, extent, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains in order to provide mitigation through preservation by record. The works will also seek to clarify the nature and extent of existing disturbance and intrusions and assess the degree of archaeological survival of buried deposits and surviving structures of archaeological significance.
- 3.2 These aims were achieved through pursuit of the following specific objectives:
 - i) To define and identify the nature of archaeological deposits on site, and date these where possible;
 - ii) To attempt to characterise the nature of the archaeological sequence and recover as much information as possible about the spatial patterning of features present on the site;
 - iii) To recover a well dated stratigraphic sequence and recover coherent artefact, ecofact and environmental samples, including an assessment of the environmental potential.

4 METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 The normal requirements for evaluation work on this site would be for a 10% sample, which would require approximately a total length of 1400m of 1.8m wide trench. At present, however, the site is occupied by standing buildings and roads, some of which are still in use. The greater part of the site is, therefore, unavailable for evaluation at this stage. It was proposed, therefore, to undertake the evaluation works in two phases; pre- and post-demolition of the existing structures.
- 4.2 Phase 1 involved the excavation of 65 linear metres of trenching and a test-pit. This work would allow an initial indication of the archaeological potential of the site. In the event, in order to avoid Modern drains/foundations, Trenches 1, 3 and 4 were subject to minor re-location, and, due to space restrictions, only part of Trench 4 was excavated. Test Pit 1 was located within the disused Friars Walk complex, immediately north of Friar Street. It was not possible to excavate the test pit due to the presence of a thick layer of re-enforced concrete. All amendments to the proposed trenching programme were agreed, on site, with Mary O'Donoghue of Berkshire Archaeology. The final trench locations are shown in Figure 2.
- 4.3 Phase 2 will be undertaken after the demolition of the existing buildings and any bulk excavation of made-up ground. Any such bulk excavation should be undertaken under archaeological supervision in order to minimise the potential of unintended impact upon undisturbed ground. The scope of these archaeological works will be defined depending on the results of the first stage of investigation and mitigated through detailed design information which will allow a determination of where ground disturbance will actually occur and is unavoidable. Any further trenching will be located once the extent of cellaring/other disturbance is known and will take into account the results of the Phase 1 trenches.
- 4.4 The WSI specified that non-significant overburden was to be removed to the top of archaeological deposits or to the depth required for the development, whichever was encountered first. In the event, all of the trenches contained deep deposits of modern overburden. These were excavated to a relatively safe working depth of approximately 1.4m. Thereafter, in order to reveal deeper stratified deposits, exploratory sondages were excavated, recorded and, due to health and safety constraints, immediately backfilled to the working depth. All amendments to the WSI excavation methodology were agreed, in advance, with Mary O'Donoghue of Berkshire Archaeology. The sondage locations are shown in Figure 2.
- 4.5 The mechanical excavation was achieved through the use of a 360° tracked excavator, equipped with a breaker and a toothless grading bucket, working under constant archaeological supervision. Thereafter, where possible, all excavation was conducted by hand. Due to the occurrence of deep sections and, in agreement with Berkshire Archaeology, feature [106]/(107) was mechanically excavated, under constant archaeological supervision.

- 4.6 Archaeological deposits and features were subjected to appropriate levels of investigation. Where excavation was required for the satisfactory assessment of archaeological deposits, a minimum 20% sample of all linear features was excavated at appropriate intervals and all intersections, overlaps and terminals were investigated. A minimum 50% sample of all non-linear features was excavated.
- 4.7 In general, features and deposits were recorded in accordance with the WSI. However, due to the presence of deep sections, the majority of measurements were taken from outside the trenches and it was not possible to draw trench or feature sections. All measurements and plans were therefore approximate.

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- 5.1 A full stratigraphic description of all contexts identified in the course of the project is listed in Appendix 1. A summary discussion is given below:
- 5.2 Due to the occurrence of deeply stratified deposits, most of the trench excavations did not penetrate Modern layers. Five sondages revealed lower deposits. The sondages comprised a total length of 15m, which represented a 0.1% sample of the total proposed development site.
- 5.3 **Trench 1** measured 15m long by 1.8m wide and was aligned northwest-southeast. Two sondages were excavated within the trench in order to penetrate through modern deposits.
- 5.4 Sondage 1 was excavated to a depth of 3.23m from the modern ground surface. The earliest revealed deposit comprised a blue grey clay (115). The clay was visible at a depth of approximately 2.93m (34.82m OD) in the southwest facing section and at 3.23m (34.52m OD) in the northeast facing section; a difference of 0.30m. This deposit was overlaid by clean sand (114) and gravel layers (113) up to 1.6m thick, at a depth of 1.63m (36.12m OD) from the modern ground surface. No artefactual material was recovered from any of these deposits, which appear to be consistent with an interpretation of these deposits as alluvial clays interleaved with River Terrace Gravels.
- 5.5 Feature [106] was cut into the top of layer (113) and comprised a fairly substantial north-south aligned cut, which extended beyond the west limit of excavation. Fill (107) contained a fragment of Medieval or Post-medieval tile, along with two animal bone fragments. The nature of fill (107), along with its association with pre-Modern artefactual material, suggested that feature [106] was unlikely to be of Modern origin.
- 5.6 Feature [106] and layer (113), were directly overlaid by layer (105), which contained frequent Modern artefacts. The bottom of context (105), therefore, probably represented the base of Modern impact within the sondage, at a depth of approximately 1.6m below Modern ground surface.

- 5.7 Sondage 2; was excavated onto a sand/gravel layer (119), which comprised the earliest deposit within the sondage at a similar depth to layer (113) in Sondage 1. This was overlaid by layer (112), which contained undiagnostic tile fragments and, as such, is of uncertain date.
- 5.8 Layer (112) was stratigraphically earlier than wall (120) and layer (111). Wall (120) comprised mortar bonded machine-made bricks and was possibly of a later Post-medieval or, more probably, Modern date. Layer (111) contained concrete fragments and was almost certainly Modern. The bottom of contexts (120) and (111), therefore, represented the base of demonstrably Modern deposits, at an approximate depth below Modern ground surface of 2.65m (35.08m OD) and 1.85m (35.88m OD) respectively.
- 5.9 **Trench 2** measured 20m long by 1.8m wide and was aligned approximately north-south. A single sondage was excavated within the trench.
- 5.10 The Sondage was excavated onto a blue grey to beige plastic clay (204)/(205) at a depth of 2.62m (35.13m OD) from the modern ground surface. This layer was completely devoid of artefactual material and is likely to represent a 'natural' deposit. Context (203) directly overlaid clay (204)/(205) and comprised a substantial deposit of interleaved dumped layers, which consistently contained Modern material. The bottom of context (203), therefore, represented the base of Modern impact.
- 5.11 **Trench 3** measured 15m long by 1.8m wide and was aligned east northeastwest southwest. A single sondage was excavated within the trench.
- 5.12 The Sondage was excavated onto a blue grey clay (304) at a depth of 2.20m (35.37m OD) below the modern ground surface which formed the lowest deposit within the sondage. This layer was completely devoid of artefactual material and is likely to represent a 'natural' deposit. Context (303) directly overlaid the clay and consisted of a substantial deposit of sloping, dumped layers, which contained frequent Modern artefacts. The bottom of context (303), therefore, represented the base of Modern impact.
- 5.13 **Trench 4** could not be excavated to its full length due to spatial restrictions. In the event only a trench 6.5m long by 1.8m wide could be excavated on approximately an east-west alignment. A single sondage was excavated within the trench.
- 5.14 The Sondage was excavated onto a deposit of 'natural' clay, sand and gravel with patches of chalk (406) at a depth of 1.8m (36.02m) from the modern ground surface. This layer was completely devoid of artefactual material and is likely to represent a 'natural' deposit. It was overlain by a 0.60m thick layer of sand and gravel (405). This layer was also devoid of artefactual material and may also represent River Terrace Gravel at a depth of 1.2m (36.62m OD) from the modern ground surface.
- 5.15 Context (405) was overlain by a brown clay silt layer (404), which contained two fragments of Medieval or Post-medieval tile but no Modern artefacts,

- indicating that it was of pre-Modern date. This layer was, in turn, sealed by a dark grey clay silt layer (403), from which no dating evidence was recovered.
- 5.16 Layer (402) overlay (403) and comprised brick and concrete rubble, was of Modern origin, and was stratigraphically earlier than feature [407]/(408). It was in turn sealed by the modern concrete land surface (401). The bottom of context (402), therefore, represented the base of demonstrably Modern impact at an approximate depth of 0.45m below the existing ground surface. Feature [407]/(408) also represented Modern impact and extended below the maximum depth of excavation to depth of at least 1.80m below Modern ground surface.

6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The Phase 1 evaluation constituted a very small sample of the total proposed development area and the results from the project only revealed dispersed and relatively isolated stratigraphic sequences.
- 6.2 A Medieval or early Post-medieval feature was identified in Trench 1, cut into the top of the natural gravel. Two layers (404 and 403), which are likely to be of similar date, were also identified in Trench 4. The nature of previous development within the area of Trench 4 is likely to have involved truncation of Post-medieval deposits and the two layers therefore have the potential to have originated during the Medieval or Post-medieval periods and to contain features of those dates. Trenches 2 and 3 yielded a sequence of Modern deposits, which directly overlaid clay 'natural'.
- 6.3 It was possible to determine the depth of demonstrably Modern impact and the depth of sand/gravel and/or clay deposits in all of the excavated trenches. In summary, the following data can be indicated with regard to the depths of non-significant overburden:
 - Trench 1 1.63m
 - Trench 2 2.62m
 - Trench 3 2.20m
 - Trench 4 0.45m (1.20m to the top of gravel)
- 6.4 The stratigraphic sequence identified within the trench sondages is broadly in keeping with that detailed by the BGS (2000) and from the results of boreholes in the general vicinity, although no clean deposits of chalk were identified. The basal deposits of heavy clay identified in Trenches 1-3 are likely to be alluvial deposits indicative of flooding episodes or the presence of palaeochannels. The depths of natural deposits are also much as anticipated; with shallower depths of overburden to the south, becoming deeper to the north to reflect the natural topography, which drops from the gravel ridge upon which the historic core of Reading was built, to the Thames floodplain.
- 6.5 The data from the excavated trenches will inform the mitigation of any future demolition or enabling works and will enhance the Written Scheme of

Investigation for the Phase 2 (post-demolition) archaeological evaluation. It must be noted, however, that the results of Phase 1 evaluation may not be representative of the levels of modern overburdern, or archaeological potential, across the Site.

- 6.6 Due to the presence of a re-enforced concrete layer in the area of proposed Test Pit 1, it will not be possible to evaluate the area to the north of Friar Street prior to demolition of the extant building. Any future demolition works in this area will need to be undertaken under archaeological observation/supervision in order to minimise impact on currently undefined subterranean deposits. It is expected that the archaeological evaluation of this area will form part of the Phase 2 works.
- 6.7 The archive is currently held at the offices of Foundations Archaeology, but will be deposited within 12 months with the Reading Museum under an accession code to be confirmed. A short note will be submitted for publication in a relevant journal and an OASIS form will also be submitted to ADS.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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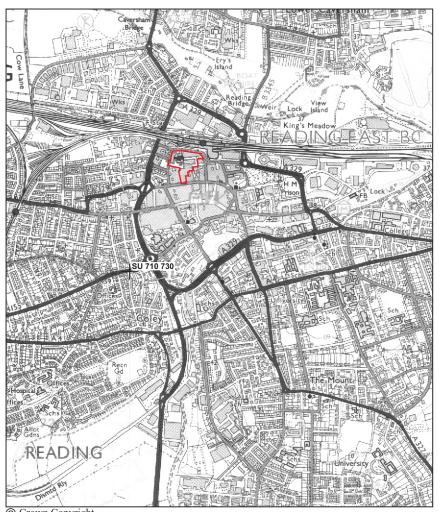
APPENDIX 1: The Stratigraphic Data

СХТ	L(m)	W(m)	D(m)	DESCRIPTION	CUTS/OVERLIES	CUT BY/OVERLAID BY
				TRENCH 1		
				Modern ground surface (mgs) = 37.75m AOD		
				Maximum depth of Sondage 1 = 3.23m (34.52m AOD) below mgs.		
				Maximum depth of Sondage 2 = 2.75m (35.13m AOD) below mgs.		
101	na	na	0.4	Mgs; re-enforced concrete.	102, 108, 118	na
102	na	na	0.4	Compact layer of stone, tarmac and brick. Abutted 118.	103	101
103	na	na	0.23	Layer of cinder with brick fragments.	105, [116]/104/117	102, 122
104	?	?	?	Fill of posthole [116]; vertically set wooden post. Surrounded by packing fill 117.	105	103
105	na	na	0.6	Layer of grey clay silt, which contained frequent chalk, stone and brick fragments, along	113, [106]/107	[116]/104/117, 103, 122
				with chinaware pottery sherds and fragments of glass.		
[106]	1.3	0.6	1.1	North-south aligned linear cut feature with a sloping profile. Extended beyond the	113	105
				west edge of excavation. Contained fill 107.		
107	1.3	0.6	1.1	Fill of feature [106]; light brown clay silt, which contained occasional gravel and	113	105
				occasional charcoal flecks, along with two bone fragments and a small fragment of Medieval or		
				Post-medieval tile.		
108	na	na	0.2	Loose-core.	109	101
109	na	na	0.15	Brick rubble layer.	110	108
110	na	na	0.25	Layer of dark brown soil, cinder and brick rubble.	120, 121	109
111	na	na	0.35	Layer of light beige, loose concrete and mortar fragments. Abutted wall 120.	112	121
112	na	na	0.8	Dark grey brown clay silt, which contained occasional gravel and chalk lumps, along	119	111, 120
				with occasional charcoal flecks and occasional undiagnostic tile fragments.		
113	na	na	1.3	Light beige brown clay/sand/gravel, which contained occasional chalk flecks.	114, 115	[106]/107, 105
114	na	na	0.4	Orange brown sand gravel.	115	113
115	na	na	0.3	Blue grey plastic clay.	na	113, 114
[116]	?	?	?	Posthole with vertical sides and a flat base. Contained post 104 and	105	103
				packing fill 117.		

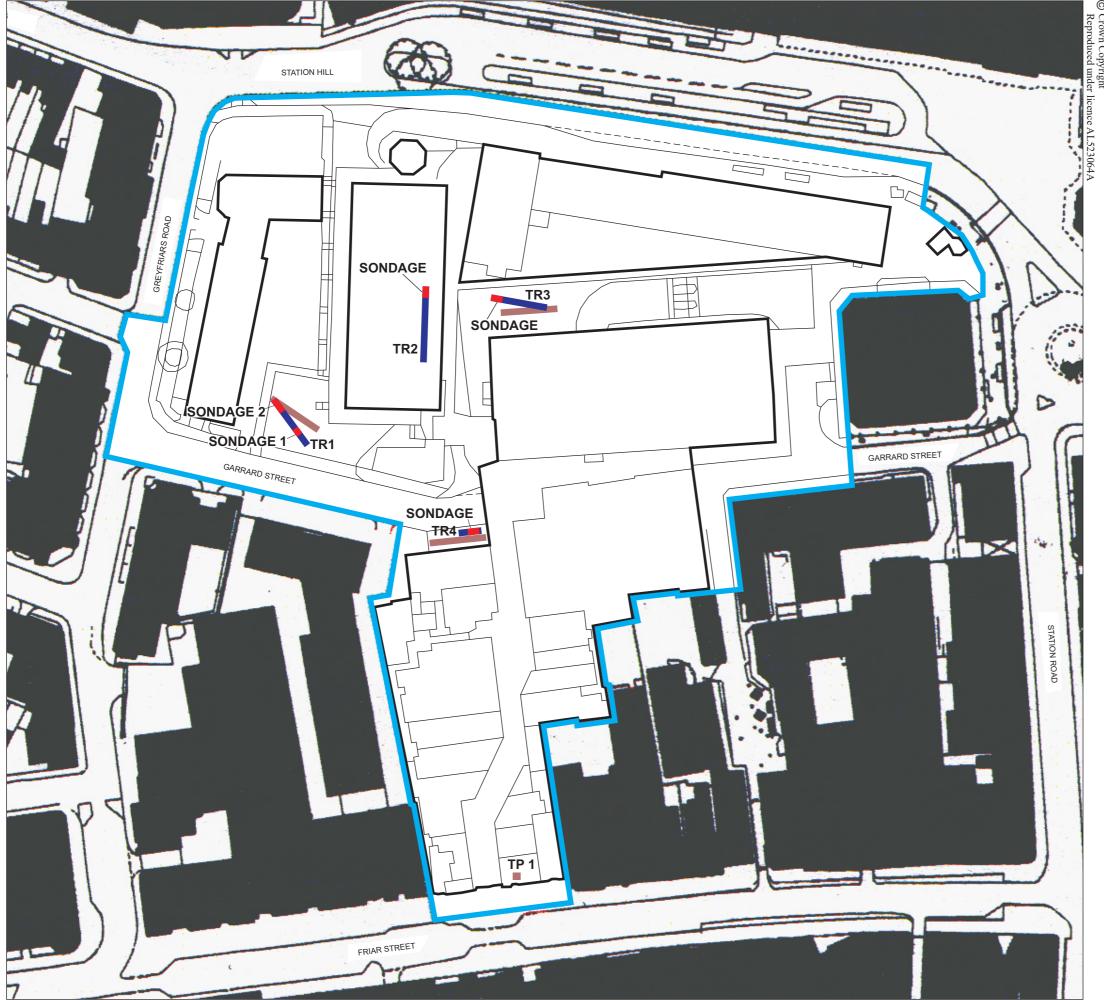
СХТ	L(m)	W(m)	D(m)	DESCRIPTION	CUTS/OVERLIES	CUT BY/OVERLAID BY
117	?	?	?	Fill of posthole [116]; dark grey brown silt sand packing fill. Surrounded post 104.	105	103
118	na	na	0.5	Compact deposit of stones. Abutted 102.	122	101
119	na	na	0.2	Mid brown sand gravel.	na	112
120	?	?	1.65	Brick wall with white mortar. Orange red machine-made bricks; 0.23m X 0.11m X 0.07m.	112	110
				Abutted layers 111 and 121.		
121	?	?	0.5	Compact layer of soil, gravel and brick fragments. Abutted wall 120.	111	110
122	?	?	0.2	Brick layer.	105, 103	118
				TRENCH 2		
				Modern ground surface (mgs) = 37.75m AOD		
				Maximum depth of Sondage = 3.22m (34.53m AOD) below mgs.		
201	na	na	0.37	Mgs; re-enforced concrete.	202	na
202	na	na	0.4	Compact layer of stone and tarmac.	203	201
203	na	na	1.85	Hetrogeneous, interleaved fill, which contained modern artefacts throughout.	204	202
204	na	na	0.4	Blue grey plastic clay. Probabaly equivalent to 205.	205	203
205	na	na	0.2	Beige plastic clay.	na	204
				TRENCH 3		
				Modern ground surface (mgs) = 37.57m AOD		
				Maximum depth of Sondage = 2.40m (35.17m AOD) below mgs.		
301	na	na	0.05	Mgs; paving slabs.	302	na
302	na	na	0.13	Light beige sand bedding layer.	303	301
303	na	na	2.02	Hetrogeneous fill, which comprised sloping dump layers. Contained modern	304	302
				artefacts throughout.		
304	na	na	0.2	Blue grey plasic clay.	na	303

Station Hill and Friars Walk, Friar Street, Reading: Archaeological Evaluation

СХТ	L(m)	W(m)	D(m)	DESCRIPTION	CUTS/OVERLIES	CUT BY/OVERLAID BY
				TRENCH 4		
				Modern ground surface (mgs) = 37.82m AOD		
				Maximum depth of Sondage = 1.80m (36.02m AOD) below mgs.		
401	na	na	0.3	Mgs; re-enforced concrete.	402, [407]/408	na
402	na	na	0.15	Brick and concrete rubble layer.	403	[407]/408, 401
403	na	na	0.25	Dark grey brown clay silt, which contained frequent chalk flecks.	404	402, [407]/408
404	na	na	0.5	Brown clay silt, which contained frequent gravel, along with occasional chalk lumps,	405	403, [407]/408
				occasional charcoal flecks and two fragments of Medieval or Post-medieval tile.		
405	na	na	0.6	Orange brown sand gravel.	406	404, [407]/408
406	na	na	?	Brown orange clay/sand/gravel, which contained occasional patches of chalk.	na	405, [407]/408
[407]	?	?	1.5	Cut feature with vertical sides. Contained fill 408.	402, 403, 404,	401
					405, 406	
408	?	?	1.5	Fill of feature [407]; grey loose-core.	402, 403, 404,	401
					405, 406	



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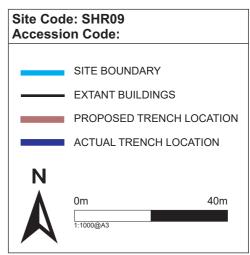
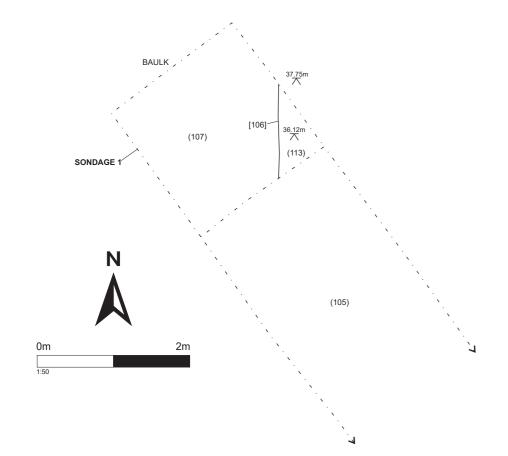
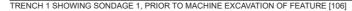


FIGURE 2: Trench Locations

TRENCH 1 PLAN SHOWING SONDAGE 1, PRIOR TO MACHINE EXCAVATION OF FEATURE [106]





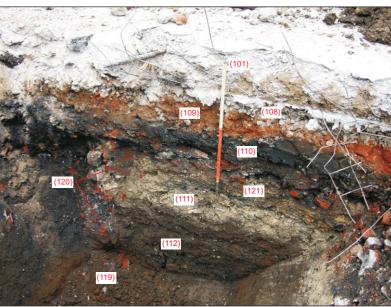




NORTHEAST FACING SECTION TRENCH 1 SONDAGE 1



SOUTHWEST FACING SECTION TRENCH 1 SONDAGE 1



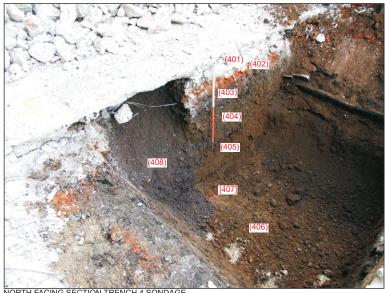
NORTHEAST FACING SECTION TRENCH 1 SONDAGE 2



EAST FACING SECTION TRENCH 2 SONDAGE



NORTH FACING SECTION TRENCH 3 SONDAGE (NO SCALE DUE TO UNSTABLE SECTION)



NORTH FACING SECTION TRENCH 4 SONDAGE

FIGURE 4: Trenches 2, 3 and 4 Photographs



NORTHWEST FACING SHOT TRENCH 1



NORTH FACING SHOT TRENCH 2



WEST FACING SHOT TRENCH 3



SOUTHWEST FACING SHOT TRENCH 4

FIGURE 5: General Shots of Trenches 1-4