

**LAND AT THE WESTBURY LANE OVERPASS,  
PURLEY ON THAMES,  
WEST BERKSHIRE.**

**NGR: SU 6548 7650**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

**Quality Assurance**

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**Land at the Westbury Lane Overpass, Purley on Thames, West Berkshire: Archaeological Evaluation**

**SUMMARY**

Between 20<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2011 Foundations Archaeology undertook a programme of archaeological evaluation on land at the Westbury Lane Overpass, Purley on Thames, West Berkshire (NGR: SU 6548 7650). The project was commissioned by Waterman Energy, Environment & Design Ltd. on behalf of Carillion plc.

The evaluation comprised the excavation and recording of six 30m and one 60m evaluation trenches within two proposed railway works compound areas immediately west and east of Westbury Lane.

The archaeological trenching revealed a Middle Iron Age refuse pit, a poorly dated boundary ditch, which yielded a small amount of abraded possible Roman pottery and tile, and two possible undated ditches or gullies.

## **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 the Norman Conquest (AD 1066) and *circa* AD 1500.

### **Natural**

In archaeological terms this refers to the undisturbed natural geology of a site.

### **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 *circa* 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.* 700 BC; *Iron Age* – *c.* 700 BC to AD 43.

### **Roman**

The period between AD 43 and AD 410.

### **Saxon**

The period between AD 410 and AD 1066.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of an archaeological evaluation undertaken between 20<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2011 on land at the Westbury Lane Overpass, Purley on Thames, West Berkshire (NGR: SU 6548 7650). The project was commissioned by Waterman Energy, Environment & Design Ltd. on behalf of Carillion plc.
- 1.2 The archaeological works were undertaken in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation (2011) and the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (2008).

## **2 PROJECT BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Network Rail proposes to replace the existing Westbury Lane overpass with a new bridge. The project will require the construction of two compound work areas to the north of the railway line, on either side of Westbury Lane.
- 2.2 The site is located in the 'Thames Valley', as defined in the Historic Environment Character Zone Project - HECZ (West Berkshire Council Archaeology Service 2008), with land-use given as 're-organised farmland'.
- 2.3 The main archaeological interest in the site relates to the discovery of an Anglo-Saxon burial in this place during operations to widen the railway from two to four tracks in the 1870s. The burial was located in the area immediately north of the existing track and, therefore, was situated very close to the site area. Although isolated burials are known, there was a significant potential for the presence of a more extensive cemetery and for contemporary settlement related features within the study area. The site is located on gently sloping ground overlooking the River Thames; a topography generally accepted as significant for Anglo-Saxon activity.
- 2.4 A geophysical (magnetometer) survey, carried out in 2011 by Archaeological Services WYAS, identified a possible linear feature, as well as a general background of ferrous material. The report noted that, although this ferrous background would ordinarily be considered to represent Modern ferrous material in the ploughsoil, the possibility exists that they represent grave goods.
- 2.5 The main potential of the site was, therefore, for the recovery of Saxon finds or features; this did not prejudice the evaluation against recovery of data related to other periods.

## **3 AIMS**

- 3.1 The aims of the archaeological evaluation were to gather high quality data from the direct observation of archaeological deposits, in order to provide sufficient information to establish the nature, extent, preservation and potential

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of any surviving archaeological remains. In turn, this would allow reasonable planning decisions to be taken regarding the archaeological provision for the areas affected by the proposed works.

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.

## **4 METHODOLOGY**

4.1 In accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation, six 30m by 1.5m and one 60m by 1.5m trenches were excavated across the proposed works areas, as shown in Figure 2.

4.2 Topsoil and non-significant overburden was removed to the top of the archaeological deposits or natural, whichever was encountered first. This was achieved by the use of a JCB type mechanical excavator, equipped with a toothless grading bucket, whilst under constant archaeological direction. Thereafter all additional investigation was conducted manually by archaeologists.

4.3 All excavation and recording work was undertaken in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation and the Foundations Archaeology Technical Manual 3: Excavation Manual.

## **5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

5.1 A full stratigraphic description of all the contexts identified in the course of the project is presented in Appendix 1, along with a report on the recovered pottery in Appendix 2. A summary discussion is given below.

5.2 The general stratigraphy was fairly uniform across the investigation area. The natural deposits, which consisted of weathered chalk overlaid by banded glacial sands and gravels, were present at an average depth of 0.52m (46.38m OD) below Modern ground. The natural was overlaid by a soft clay-sand-gravel subsoil, up to 0.42m thick. The subsoil varied in thickness across the evaluated area and completely dissipated at the southern end of Trench 7 (Figure 5a). A dark brown, soft silt sand ploughsoil, up to 0.30m thick, overlaid the subsoil. A total of five features were present within the trenches.

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- 5.3 Ditches [103]/(104) and [203]/(204) were situated at the approximate location of the possible linear feature(s) identified in the previous geophysical survey and probably represented parts of a ditch or field boundary. A small assemblage of abraded artefacts recovered from the ditch comprised two possible Roman pottery sherds and two fragments of possible Roman tile, along with a struck flint and bone/teeth fragments. In light of the relatively small number of datable artefacts, along with their abraded condition, which suggested re-deposition, the ditch remains poorly dated.
- 5.4 Features [403] and [405] contained sand fills similar to natural sand patches and banding, which occurred across the site. The feature fills contained rare flecks of charcoal, however; it was uncertain if the features represented archaeological ditches/gullies or natural linear banding, which contained intrusive charcoal.
- 5.5 Pit [407] was cut into the top of the natural substrates, was sealed beneath the subsoil and appeared to be relatively well preserved. The pit contained five layered fills (408) – (412), which yielded a mixture of artefacts including burnt flint, charcoal flecks and lumps, flecks of heated clay or daub, bone fragments, one of which had been burnt, as well as pottery. A total of seven unabraded Middle Iron Age pottery sherds were present in basal fills (408) and (410), along with a further two sherds of Iron Age pottery from upper fills (411) and (412). The feature was, therefore, most likely to be of Middle Iron Age date and was probably a refuse pit, which contained domestic detritus.
- 5.6 Pit [407] is a fairly significant feature as it represents good evidence for Middle Iron Age settlement activity at or near this location.

## **6 CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 The archaeological works have revealed a Middle Iron Age refuse pit, a poorly dated boundary ditch, which yielded a small amount of abraded Roman pottery and tile, and two possible undated ditches or gullies.
- 6.2 No Saxon deposits were present within the trenches, however; it was not possible to entirely rule out the potential for the presence of isolated burials within the study area.
- 6.3 The archive is currently held at the offices of Foundations Archaeology, but will be deposited within 12 months with the appropriate museum. A short note will be submitted for publication in the relevant local archaeological journal and an OASIS form will also be submitted to ADS.

## **7 BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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## **8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Foundations Archaeology would like to thank Ben Stephenson and Richard Stockwell of Waterman Energy, Environment & Design Ltd. and Duncan Coe of West Berkshire Council for their assistance during the course of this project.

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APPENDIX 1: Stratigraphic Data

CXT	L(m)	W(m)	D(m)	DESCRIPTION	LATER THAN	EARLIER THAN
				<b>Trench 1 = 30m by 1.5m; natural deposits at 44.14m OD (average).</b>		
101	na	na	North end of trench = 0.30	Dark brown, soft silt sand ploughsoil, which contained occasional charcoal flecks.	104	na
			South end of trench = 0.30			
102	na	na	North end of trench = 0.16	Mid brown, soft clay sand gravel subsoil, which contained rare charcoal flecks and a piece of CBM.	nat.	[103]?
			South end of trench = 0.22			
[103]	1.5	1.48	0.56	Northwest - southeast aligned ditch with a sloping profile. Contained fill 104.	102?	104
104	1.5	1.48	0.56	Fill of ditch [103]; brown clay sand, which contained occasional charcoal flecks, a piece of CBM, a struck flint and 6 bone/teeth fragments.	[103]	101
				<b>Trench 2 = 30m by 1.5m; natural deposits at 44.63m OD (average).</b>		
201	na	na	Northwest end of trench = 0.25	Dark brown, soft silt sand ploughsoil, which contained rare charcoal flecks.	204	na
			Southeast end of trench = 0.29			
202	na	na	Northwest end of trench = 0.15	Mid brown, soft clay sand gravel subsoil, which contained rare charcoal flecks.	nat.	[203]
			Southeast end of trench = 0.25			
[203]	2	1.96	0.37	East - west aligned ditch with a rounded profile. Contained fill 204.	202	204
204	2	1.96	0.37	Fill of ditch [203]; mid-dark brown clay sand, which contained occasional charcoal flecks, along with a piece of CBM.	[203]	201
				<b>Trench 3 = 60m by 1.5m; natural deposits at 45.37m OD (average).</b>		
301	na	na	West end of trench = 0.23	Dark brown, soft silt sand ploughsoil, which contained rare charcoal flecks.	302	na
			East end of trench = 0.26			
302	na	na	West end of trench = 0.28	Mid brown, soft clay sand gravel subsoil, which contained occasional charcoal flecks.	nat.	301
			East end of trench = 0.24			

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CXT	L(m)	W(m)	D(m)	DESCRIPTION	LATER THAN	EARLIER THAN
				<b>Trench 4 = 32m by 1.5m; natural deposits at 46.43m OD (average).</b>		
401	na	na	North end of trench = 0.27 South end of trench = 0.30	Dark brown, soft silt sand ploughsoil, which contained occasional charcoal flecks.	402	na
402	na	na	North end of trench = 0.21 South end of trench = 0.42	Mid brown, soft clay sand gravel subsoil, which contained occasional charcoal flecks.	404, 406 and 412	401
[403]	1.7	1	0.29	Possible northwest - southeast aligned ditch/gully with a sloping profile. Contained fill 404.	nat.	404
404	1.7	1	0.29	Fill of feature [403]; light brown, soft silt sand, which contained rare charcoal flecks.	[403]	402
[405]	1.6	0.5	0.15	Possible west-southwest - east-northeast aligned ditch/gully with a shallow, rounded profile. Contained fill 406.	nat.	406
406	1.6	0.5	0.15	Fill of feature [405]; light brown, soft silt sand, which contained rare charcoal flecks.	[405]	402
[407]	1.45	1.2	1.07	Sub-oval pit with steep sides and a flat base. The edges of the pit undercut the natural deposits towards the base of the feature. Contained fills 408 to 412.	nat.	408
408	?	1.17	0.21	Primary fill of pit [407]; dark brown, friable clay sand, which contained frequent flint, frequent pieces of chalk, frequent charcoal flecks and lumps and three bone fragments.	[407]	409
409	?	1.17	0.19	Secondary fill of pit [407]; mid brown, friable sand silt, which contained rare flint, rare chalk pieces and frequent charcoal flecks and lumps.	408	410
410	?	1.06	0.18	Tertiary fill of pit [407]; dark brown, friable sand silt, which contained frequent chalk pieces, frequent charcoal flecks and lumps, 13 bone/teeth fragments (including one fragment of burnt bone) and frequent lumps of burnt flint.	409	411
411	?	1	0.35	Fill of pit [407]; tan brown sand silt, which contained frequent burnt flint, frequent pieces of chalk, frequent charcoal flecks and lumps, a fragment of bone and occasional flecks of pink/orange (heated) clay or daub.	410	412
412	?	1.2	0.31	Fill of pit [407]; mid brown clay sand, which contained frequent burnt flint, occasional pieces of chalk and frequent charcoal flecks.	411	402

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CXT	L(m)	W(m)	D(m)	DESCRIPTION	LATER THAN	EARLIER THAN
				<b>Trench 5 = 30m by 1.5m; natural deposits at 47.98m OD (average).</b>		
501	na	na	West end of trench = 0.23	Dark brown, soft silt sand ploughsoil, which contained rare charcoal flecks.	502	na
			East end of trench = 0.27			
502	na	na	West end of trench = 0.20	Mid brown, soft clay sand gravel subsoil.	nat.	501
			East end of trench = 0.40			
				<b>Trench 6 = 30m by 1.5m; natural deposits at 47.47m OD (average).</b>		
601	na	na	West end of trench = 0.26	Dark brown, soft silt sand ploughsoil, which contained rare charcoal flecks.	602	na
			East end of trench = 0.28			
602	na	na	West end of trench = 0.35	Mid brown, soft clay sand gravel subsoil, which contained rare charcoal flecks.	nat.	601
			East end of trench = 0.35			
				<b>Trench 7 = 30m by 1.5m; natural deposits at 48.61m OD (average).</b>		
701	na	na	North end of trench = 0.25	Dark brown, soft silt sand ploughsoil.	702	na
			South end of trench = 0.25			
702	na	na	North end of trench = 0.29	Mid brown, soft clay sand gravel subsoil, which contained rare charcoal flecks.	nat.	701
			South end of trench = 0.00			

## **APPENDIX 2: The Pottery**

By Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 13 sherds with a total weight of 329g. It was mostly of Iron Age date.

The following fabrics were present:

F1: Fine Sand and Flint. Iron Age. Fairly hard, fine sandy matrix, rare quartz up to 0.5mm, rare angular white flint and calcareous material up to 2mm, rare rounded red iron oxide up to 5mm. Sparse flecks of silver mica. Outer and/or inner surfaces smoothed and burnished. 6 sherds, 296g.

F2: Fine. Iron Age. As F1, but much softer, and lacking the fine sand matrix. 2 sherds, 17g.

F3: Fine Flint. Iron Age. Fairly hard. Sparse to moderate angular white flint up to 4mm, most, 1mm or less. Fine flecks of silver mica, smoothed and lightly burnished surfaces. 1 sherd, 16g.

F4: Sandy. Romano-British? Sparse to moderate sub-rounded quartz up to 0.5mm. 2 sherds, < 1g

In addition, a somewhat abraded fragment of Romano-British grog-tempered tile (8g) occurred in context (204), and a fragment of the same (1g) occurred in context (104).

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 1. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*. The flint-gritted fabrics are similar to pottery from other Iron Age sites in the Reading area, such as Aldermaston Wharf and Reading Waterfront (Underwood 1997, 151).

One of the fabric F1 sherds from context (410) has fragments of what appears to be incised curvilinear decoration on the outer surface. A sherd with similar decoration and fabric occurred at the Reading Waterfront site, where it was situated in the same context as a partially complete biconical bowl of Middle Iron Age (5th – 3rd century BC) date (ibid. Fig. 84 no.2). The sherd from this site is therefore likely to be of a similar date.

The four sherds from context (408) were all from the same vessel, with three joining to give a profile through the upper body and rim. The fourth, non-joining sherd was a complete flat base. The vessel had a fairly long, upright and slightly everted rim, and with a rounded, 'slack' shoulder. This also appears to be of Middle Iron Age date.

The two sherds from context (104) were far too small to allow confident identification, but given the presence of the fragment of Romano-British tile in the

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same context, they appear to be of that date, although it is possible that they could be early medieval sandy wares of 12th – 13th century date.

**Bibliography**

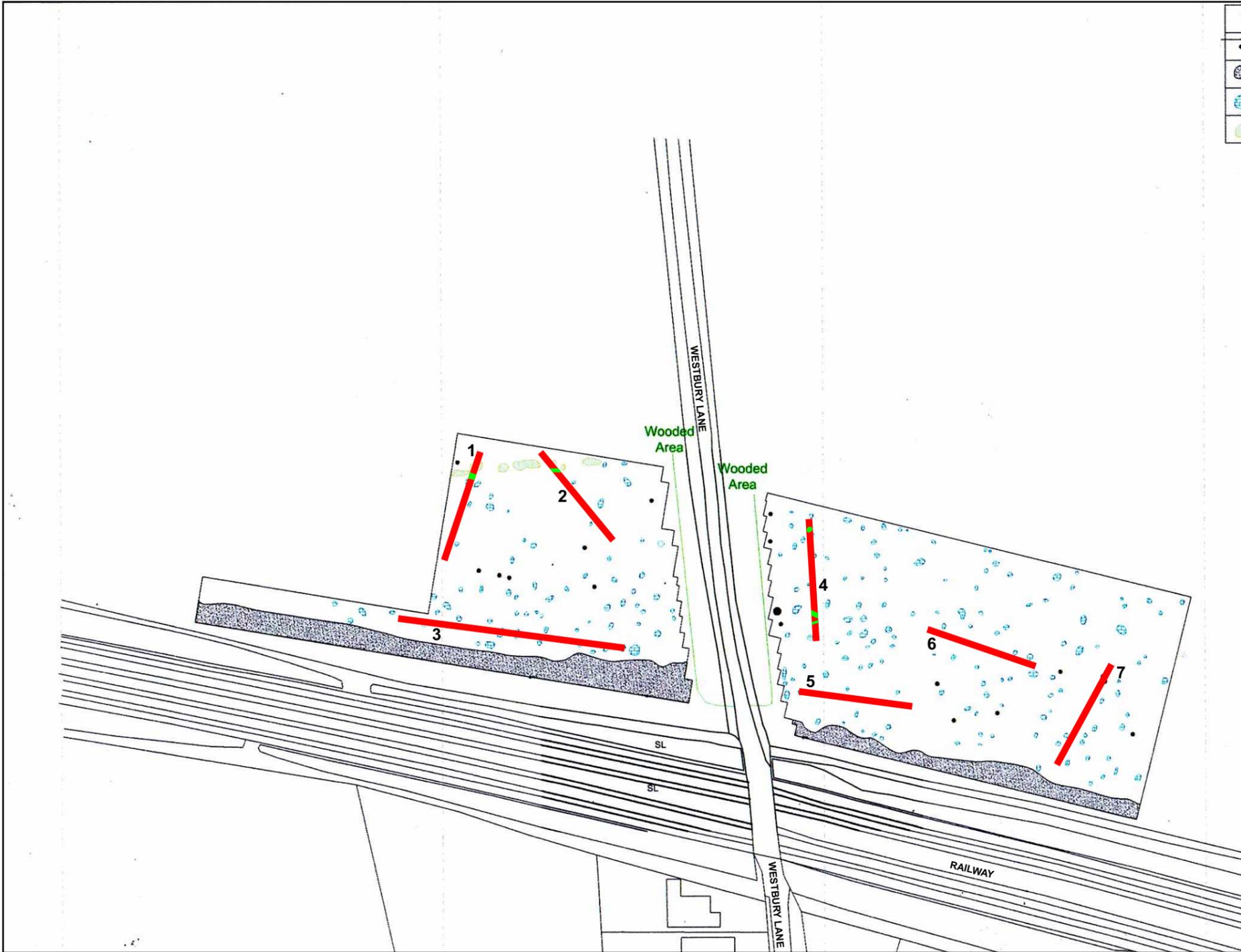
Underwood, C, 1997 Pottery in JW Hawkes and PJ Fasham, Excavations on Reading Waterfront Sites, 1979-1988 Wessex Archaeol Rep 5, 142-161

*Table 1: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type*

Cntxt	F1		F2		F3		F4		Date
	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
104							2	<1	RB?
408	4	236							MIA
410	2	60	1	11					MIA
411			1	6					IA
412					1	16			IA
	6	296	2	17	1	16	2	<1	

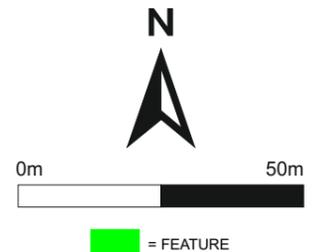


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**Accession Code:**  
**FIGURE 1: Site Location**

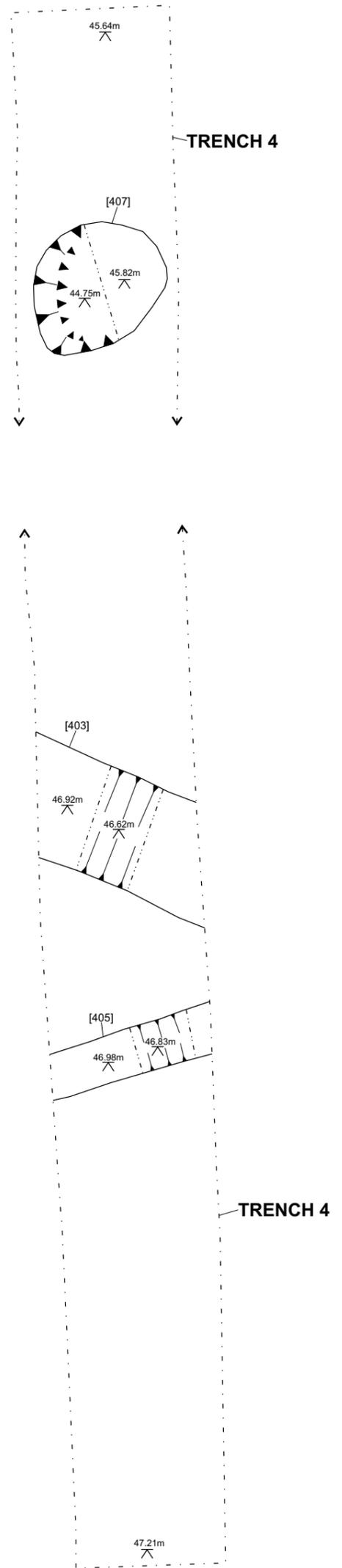
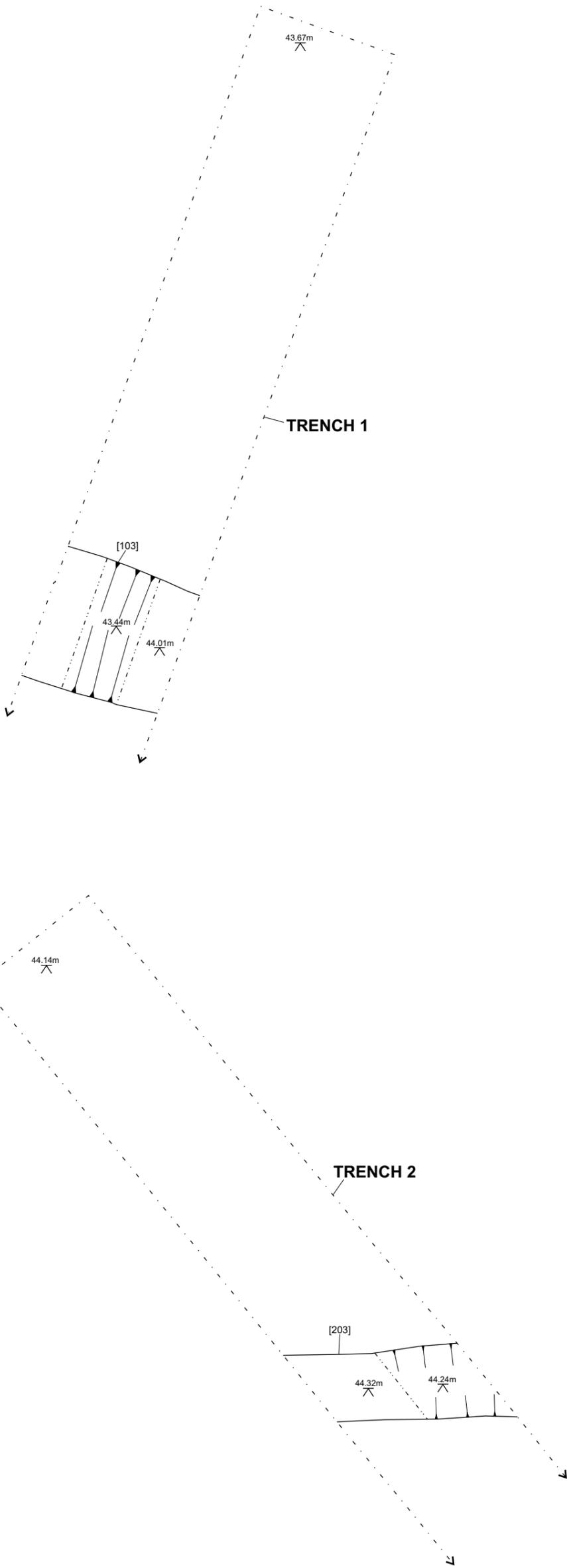


TYPE OF ANOMALY	INTERPRETATION
•	DIPOLAR ISOLATED FERROUS MATERIAL
⊗	MAGNETIC DISTURBANCE FERROUS MATERIAL
⊕	MAGNETIC ENHANCEMENT GEOLOGY
⊙	MAGNETIC ENHANCEMENT ARCHAEOLOGY?

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**FIGURE 2: Trench/Feature Locations in Relation to Geophysics Results**



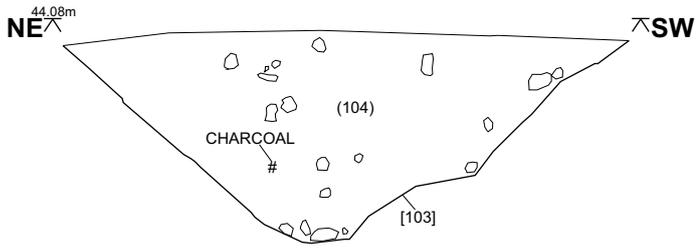
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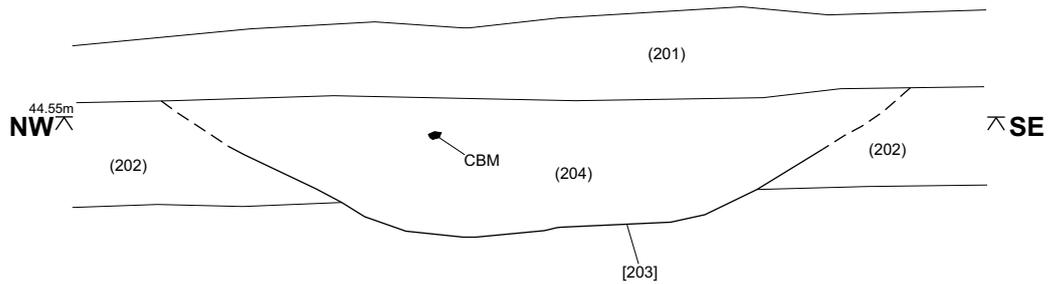
0m 2m

**FIGURE 3: Trench Plans**

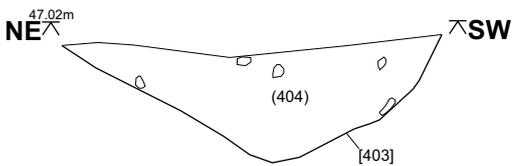
**NORTHWEST FACING SECTION [103]**



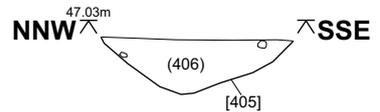
**SOUTHWEST FACING SECTION [203]**



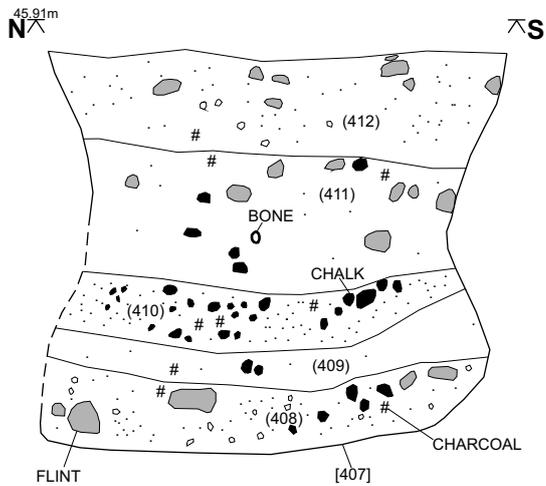
**NORTHWEST FACING SECTION [403]**



**WEST-SOUTHWEST FACING SECTION [405]**



**WEST FACING SECTION [407]**



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<b>FIGURE 4: Sections</b>



**FIGURE 5a: MACHINE CUT GEO-TECH PIT AT SOUTHERN END OF TRENCH 7 SHOWING NATURAL GEOLOGY OVERLAID BY PLOUGHSOIL (701)**



**FIGURE 5b: PIT [407]**

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**FIGURE 5: Photographs**