

T H A M E S V A L L E Y

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**19 and 19A High Street,
Theale, West Berkshire**

Archaeological Evaluation

by Aidan Colyer

**Site Code: 19HST21/81
(SU 6440 7130)**

**19 and 19A High Street, Theale,
West Berkshire**

**An Archaeological Evaluation
for TA Fisher Ltd.**

by Aidan Colyer
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd.

Site Code
19HST21/81

November 2021

Summary

Site name: 19 and 19A High Street, Theale, West Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 6440 7130

Site activity: Archaeological Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 10th-11th November 2021

Project coordinator: Tim Dawson

Site supervisor: Aidan Colyer

Site code: 19HST21/81

Summary of results: The evaluation was carried out as intended.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with West Berkshire Museum in due course.

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www.tvas.co.uk/reports/reports.asp.*

Report edited/checked by:	Steve Preston✓22.11.21 Steve Ford✓22.11.21
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19 and 19A High Street, Theale, West Berkshire An Archaeological Evaluation

by Aidan Colyer

Report 21/81b

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at 19 and 19A High Street, Theale, West Berkshire (SU 6440 7130) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Guy Deakin of T A Fisher, Theale Court, 11-13 High Street, Theale, Reading, RG7 5AH.

Planning permission (18/03209/FULEXT) has been gained on appeal (APP/W0340/W/19/3243107) from West Berkshire Council for the demolition of existing buildings and construction of 15 new dwellings and 2 retail units with associated access, parking and landscaping (SU 6440 7130). The consent is subject to a condition (4) relating to archaeology. A second condition (5) which requires building recording prior to demolition is governed by a separate scheme of works (see Milbank 2021). In light of the possibility of archaeological features being present which could be disturbed by ground works for the development, field evaluation by means of trial trenching has been requested in order to inform the planning application. This is in accordance with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2021), and the Council's policies on archaeology.

The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Ms Sarah Orr, Senior Archaeologist, West Berkshire Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by Aidan Colyer and David Platt between 10th-11th October 2021 and the site code is 19HST21/81. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with West Berkshire Museum in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on Theale High Street which is the main thoroughfare of the village centre. The surrounding area is fully built up with buildings of late post-medieval to modern date. Theale itself lies within the Kennet Valley (Fig. 1). The site is flat and lies at a height of 46m aOD. The geology is mapped as Beenham Grange gravel which was observed in the trenches (BGS 2000).

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site stems from its location within the archaeologically rich Kennet Valley (Lobb and Rose 1996; Dils and Yates 2013). For example the site lies close to areas containing extensive crop-marks forming linear enclosures, and possible isolated areas of curvilinear features (Gates 1975, map 10). Roman and Medieval settlement deposits to the north have been found during archaeological works on the Theale to Bradfield pipeline (Raymond 1997). More specifically, the site lies within the historic (medieval) core of the settlement but does not appear to have Late Saxon origins as it is not documented in Domesday Book of 1086 (Williams and Martin 2002). However, of the various archaeological investigations that have taken place in the settlement previously, few have revealed evidence of Medieval activity.

Objectives and methodology

The aims of the evaluation were to determine the presence/ absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological or palaeoenvironmental deposits within the area of development.

Specific research objectives were:

- to determine if archaeologically relevant levels have survived on this site;

- to determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present;

- to determine if any components of the Late Saxon or Medieval settlement are present on the site and if so, assist in advancing knowledge of the development of the medieval settlement.

If any settlement remains are present, are they abandoned in late medieval times (perhaps due to the Black Death or similar epidemics), or did they continue into post-medieval times only to falter due to changing economic pressures?.

The potential and significance of any such deposits located will be assessed according to the research priorities such as set out in Historic England Research Agenda (Historic England 2017) or any more local or thematic research priorities such as in the Solent-Thames Research Agenda as necessary (Hey and Hind 2014).

It was proposed to excavate 4 trenches, each 10m long and between 1.6 wide. Topsoil and any other overburden were to be removed by a machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket to expose archaeologically sensitive levels, under constant archaeological supervision. Sufficient of the archaeological features and deposits exposed were then to be excavated or sampled by hand to satisfy the aims of the project, without compromising the integrity of any features that might warrant preservation *in situ* or might better be investigated under the conditions pertaining to full excavation. All spoil heaps were to be metal detected and monitored for finds.

Results

Only three of the four proposed trenches were able to be fully excavated. Due to this, and the limitations of length for trenches 1 and 3, trench 4 was extended to 12m. Trench 2 was abandoned when a significant deposit of asbestos was encountered.

All trenches were 1.6m wide and ranged in length from 9.5m to 12m, and depths were between 0.8m and 1.3m. A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

Trench 1 (Figs. 3 and 4; Pl. 2)

Trench 1 was aligned SE- NW and was 9.9m long and 0.8m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of multiple layers of Tarmac and concrete surfaces, all with associated bedding layers. These constituted the first 0.6m of the trench depth. Beneath these modern deposits was a buried soil (50) which was observed in all of the trenches. This deposit was much truncated by modern services and post medieval to Victorian construction debris. The natural geology was a mid red and grey clayey gravel. While no extant features were observed there is a possibility that a shallow edge of the ditch observed in trench 4 was observed in the section of the trench, however, the natural slope of the buried soil may account for this shallow sloping of the trench towards the north-western corner. No finds of an archaeological nature were observed.

Trench 2 (Fig. 3)

Trench 2 was aligned SE-NW. The Tarmac and concrete layers that were observed in trench 1 were also present here. Unfortunately the bedding layer for the concrete contained a significant deposit of asbestos therefore preventing the excavation of the trench due to health and safety concerns. Due to the unknown extent of the asbestos and the limited space in the areas near the trench it was not able to be moved to an appropriate place to compensate.

Trench 3 (Figs. 3 and 4; Pl. 3)

Trench 3 was aligned N-S and was 9.5m long and 0.8m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.7m of rubble and Victorian to modern footings, above a buried soil that included repeated post-medieval to modern intrusions and truncation. This lay above mid grey sandy gravel natural geology. A single feature was observed at the northernmost end of the trench. This feature [1] was a shallow ditch that had had its depth truncated by modern intrusions. The full depth of the ditch was recorded from the side of the trench. It was filled with deposit (51), a

dark brownish-grey silty clay with frequent gravel inclusions. It contained 10 sherds of Medieval pottery of 13th Century date possibly including Saintonge ware- a French import. Other finds included ceramic building material and animal bone.

Trench 4 (Figs 3 and 4, and Pls 4-6)

Trench 4 was aligned SE-NW and was 12m long and 1.3m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.25m of demolition rubble, followed by 0.45m of footings and rubble. These modern layers were above 0.6m of buried soil (50), which, in turn, lay above a mid grey sandy gravel natural geology. Two pits and a ditch were observed in this trench. It is possible that some of the depth of the buried soil (50) is part of an upper layer of ditch [3]. With the significant levels of Victorian to modern intrusion this could not be discerned.

Pit [2], which was not fully excavated due to the depth of the trench, was over 0.85m in depth and 1.8m in diameter. The upper fill (52), a mid grey silty clay with frequent gravel, was fully excavated, and the deposit below it (53), a dark grey clayey silt with frequent gravel inclusions, was excavated partially for the recovery of dating evidence and to establish the shape of the features sides.

The lower layer (53) contained two late medieval sherds but the upper layer (52) contained 4 sherds of both later medieval and early post-medieval (16th C) pottery. Both fills also contained ceramic building material and animal bone. This pit appears to cut through the buried soil (50) although the relationship was not completely clear. If so the buried soil may have begun to form in late Medieval times.

While recorded as a pit the depth, size and shape suggests that this may have been a well although this suggestion cannot be substantiated without demonstrating significant depth.

Ditch [3] ran nearly the entire length of the trench on a roughly NW to SE alignment. As discussed above the depth of the ditch was truncated by Victorian to modern intrusions in the upper layer therefore reducing the overall depth of the feature. Despite these intrusions the ditch was deep enough to allow secure dating evidence to be recovered. The width of the ditch prevented a complete slot across the entire width, as the entire width was not observed, and a partial slot was excavated to show a relationship between the ditch and pit [4]. The ditch was steep sided and had a near flat base, the depth of the uncontaminated levels was 0.37m. The single deposit fill (54), was a dark brown grey silty clay with frequent gravel inclusions. The fill contained ceramic building material, animal bone and 5 sherd of Medieval and post-medieval pottery probably dating the feature to the 16th century date.

Pit [4] was not clearly seen when the trench was first opened, however the section through ditch [3] was placed to check the area. The pit was truncated by ditch [3] and was shallow at 0.14m in depth and only 0.3m of its width remained. It was filled with deposit (55) which was a pale grey sandy clay with frequent gravel inclusions. Only animal bone was recovered from the deposit and it is therefore only datable relative to its association with ditch [3].

Pottery by Sue Anderson

Twenty-one sherds of pottery weighing 244g were collected from four contexts during the evaluation. Table 1 shows the quantification by fabric and a summary catalogue is included as Appendix 1.

Fabric	Code	Date range	No	Wt/g	Eve	MNV
Medieval coarseware sandy	MCW	L.11th-14th c.	6	64		4
Kennet Valley (Newbury) B ware	KVB	12th-15th c.	1	19		1
Unprovenanced medieval glazed ware	UPG	12th-14th c.	1	5		1
Ashampstead/Camley Gardens ware	ASH	L.12th-14th c.	1	3		1
Ashampstead-type glazed ware	ASHG	L.12th-14th c.	2	7		2
Coarse Border ware	CBW	14th-16th c.	1	6		1
Late medieval and transitional wares	LMT	L.14th-16th c.	3	33		3
Border ware	BORD	16th-17th c.	2	23	0.07	2
Glazed red earthenware	GRE	16th-18th c.	3	73	3	
Unidentified med/late med whiteware	UNWW	13th-16th c.	1	11		1
<i>Totals</i>			<i>21</i>	<i>244</i>	<i>0.07</i>	<i>14</i>

Table 1. Pottery quantification by fabric in approximate date order.

Quantification was carried out using sherd count, weight, estimated vessel equivalent (eve) and minimum number of vessels (MNV). Fabric codes were assigned from the author's fabric series (unpub.), based on descriptions of pottery from local kiln sites (e.g. Mephram and Heaton 1995; Pearce 1992; Pearce and Vince 1988) and by previous specialists working in Reading (e.g. Blinkhorn 2007 and 2013; Brown and Thomson 2013). Methods follow MPRG recommendations (MPRG 2001) and form terminology follows MPRG (1998). The results were input directly onto an Access database, which forms the archive catalogue.

Ten body sherds were recovered from fill (51) of ditch slot [1]. The group included one glazed and one unglazed sherds of Ashampstead-type ware and several sherds of unprovenanced sandy wares. These included six body and base fragments of hard grey wheelmade sandy coarsewares (4 vessels), a body sherd with a black core and paler buff-grey surfaces which had spots and streaks of clear-brownish glaze internally, and a body sherd of an unidentified whiteware. The latter was unglazed and the fabric matrix was fine with moderate coarse

quartz sand and fine mica inclusions – it is likely to be of French origin, perhaps a Saintonge or Normandy gritty ware. This group is likely to be no earlier than 13th century in date.

Five sherds were found in ditch slot [3] fill (54). These comprised a body sherd of Kennet Valley B ware, a small fragment of a late medieval redware with olive green glaze on both surfaces, and three sherds of post-medieval redwares including a tripod base from a pipkin or similar. The latter suggests a 16th/17th-century date for this fill.

The remainder of the assemblage was recovered from two fills of pit [2]. Fill (52) contained a base fragment from a late medieval and transitional fine sandy redware with an olive green glaze internally, a Coarse Border Ware body sherd with copper green glaze externally, and two body sherds of post-medieval Border Ware comprising a base fragment with internal copper green glaze and a rim fragment from a small bowl with internal light copper green glaze. From fill (53) there was a residual body sherd of Ashampstead glazed ware with white slip decoration and green glaze externally, and a base fragment of a slightly coarser late medieval and transitional vessel with internal green lead glaze. Overall, a 16th-century date is suggested for this group, although fill (53) could be slightly earlier.

Animal Bone by Ceri Falys

A small assemblage of non-human bone was recovered from four features within the evaluated area: ditches 1 (51) and 3 (54), and pits 2 (53) and 4 (55). Weighing 732g, a total of 25 pieces of bone were present for analysis (Appendix 4). The remains were generally well preserved, with little damage or erosion to the cortical bone surfaces, although a moderate to high degree of fragmentation was noted between deposits.

Initial analyses roughly sorted elements based on size, not by species, into one of three general categories: “large”, “medium”, and “small”. Horse and cow are represented by the large size category, sheep/goat, deer and pigs are represented in the medium size category, and any smaller animal (e.g. dog, cat, etc.) are designated to the “small” category. Wherever possible, specific identification of skeletal element/side and species of origin was undertaken using reference to Hillson (1992). The minimum number of animal individuals was assessed, both within and between animal species and contexts, based on the duplication of skeletal elements or differences in skeletal development.

Osteological analysis found the small assemblage contained a minimum of three animal individuals: two “large” (cows), and one “medium” animal (unidentified species) (Appendix 4). A total of 23 fragments (92.0% of the total pieces of bone recovered) were allocated to the “large” sized animal category, which had been

collected from three features (ditches 1, 3 and pit 4). Of these, a minimum of two cows were suggested by the presence of proximal ends of metacarpals in ditches 1 and 3. Although a duplication of element side was not observed (i.e. a right proximal metacarpal was recovered from 1 (51), and a left from 3 (54)) a notable size difference was observed, which suggests the presence of more than one cow individual.

A single “medium” sized mandibular fragment was recovered from 2 (53). It was not possible to suggest the animal of origin for the mandible, however, a developing tooth crown was located within a crypt in the mandible, suggesting it was a juvenile.

In summary, a minimum of three individuals was present with the small assemblage of bone, including two cows, and one “medium” unidentified animal individual. No further information could be retrieved from the remains.

Conclusion

The evaluation revealed several deposits of archaeological interest of medieval and early post-medieval date which provides some firm evidence for the presence and form of medieval activity in this part of the settlement in the 13th century onwards. Two ditches were uncovered which were perpendicular to each other with the possibility that they are part of an enclosure (croft?) though one ditch element appeared to be later than the other.

The deposits revealed, do not conform to the typical layout found both in medieval *towns* nor, as suggested from the current and recent historic layout of the settlement, with houses (shops) on the street frontage with, for example, other activities to the rear such as pit digging. The rear trench here (1) revealed no archaeological deposits and there were no traces of floors or other structural remains in trench 3 close to the current street frontage.

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APPENDIX 1: Trench details
0m at W or S end

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	99	1.6	0.8	0–0.05m Tarmac; 0.05–0.1m gravel bedding layer; 0.1–0.15m Tarmac; 0.15–0.2m gravel bedding layer; 0.2–0.29m bedding sand; 0.29–0.37m concrete; 0.37–0.47m buried sandy soil; 0.47–0.52m concrete; 0.52–0.6m bedding layer for concrete; 0.6–0.8m buried topsoil with modern truncations (50); 0.8m+ light grey clayey silt gravels (Natural geology) [PL 1]
2	1	1.6	0.7	Trench abandoned due to the presence of asbestos.
3	9.5	1.6	0.9	0–0.7m Rubble and footings; 0.7–0.9m buried soil with modern truncations (50); 0.9m+ Natural geology. Ditch 1
4	12	1.6	1.3	0–0.25m rubble; 0.25–0.7m footings and rubble; 0.7m–1.3m Buried soil (50) with modern truncations; 1.3m+ Natural geology. Pits 2 and 4; ditch 3

APPENDIX 2: Feature details

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
3	1	51	Ditch	13 th Century	Pottery
4	2	52-3	Pit	16 th Century	Pottery
4	3	54	Ditch	16 th -17 th Century	Pottery
4	4	55	Pit	Medieval?	By association

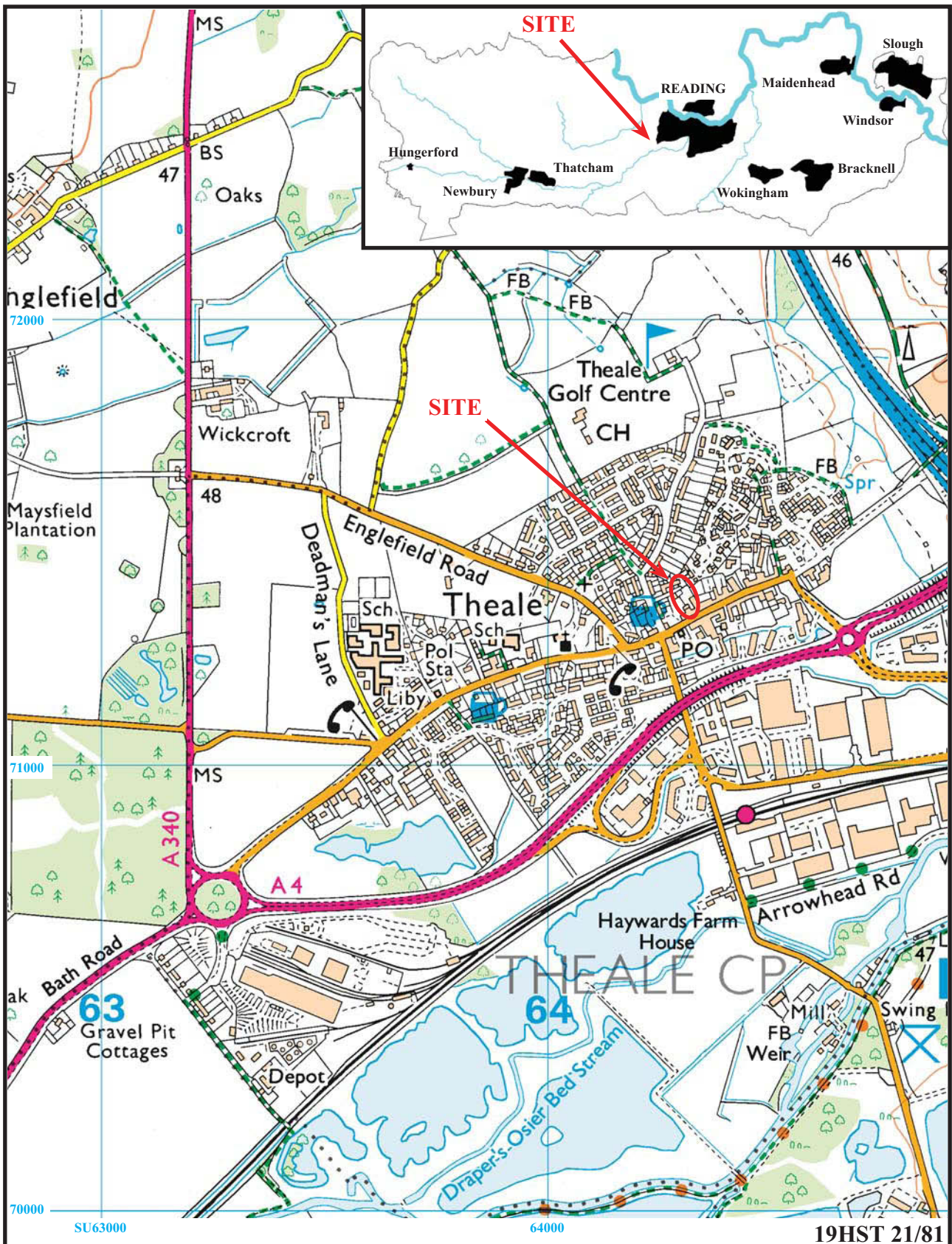
Appendix 3: Pottery summary

Full catalogue in archive as MS Access database

Cut	Context	Fabric	Type	No	Wt/g	MNV	Form	Rim	Spot date
1	51	ASH	U	1	3	1			L12-14
1	51	ASHG	D	1	3	1			L12-14
1	51	MCW	U	1	6	1			L11-14
1	51	MCW	U	1	23	1			L11-14
1	51	MCW	B	1	26	1			L11-14
1	51	MCW	U	3	9	1			L11-14
1	51	UNWW	U	1	11	1			13-15
1	51	UPG	U	1	5	1			L.12-14
2	52	BORD	B	1	16	1			16-17
2	52	BORD	R	1	7	1	BL?	BD	16-17
2	52	CBW	D	1	6	1			14-16
2	52	LMT	B	1	14	1			L14-16
2	53	ASHG	D	1	4	1			L12-14
2	53	LMT	D	1	16	1			L14-16
3	54	KVB	U	1	19	1			12-15
3	54	LMT	D	1	3	1			L14-16
3	54	GRE	D	2	36	2			16-18
3	54	GRE	B	1	37	1			16-17?

APPENDIX 4: Inventory of animal bone. Key: lbsf = long bone shaft fragment

Context		# of Frag	Weight (g)	Identified fragments – by animal size			Unidentified	Comments
Cut	Deposit			Large	Medium	Small		
1	51	12	85	12 (cow)	-	-	-	Cow: tooth, proximal metacarpal (R); "Large": Lbsfs
2	53	2	34	-	1	-	1	"Medium" mandibular fragment, with developing crown in a crypt; unidentified lbsf
3	54	4	398	4 (cow)	-	-	-	Cow: distal radius (R), proximal metacarpal (L); "Large": Lbsfs (2)
4	55	7	215	7 (cow)	-	-	-	Cow: fragment of mandible (L)
Total/MNI		25	732g	23 fragments (2 cows)	1 fragment (1 "medium")	-	1 fragment	-

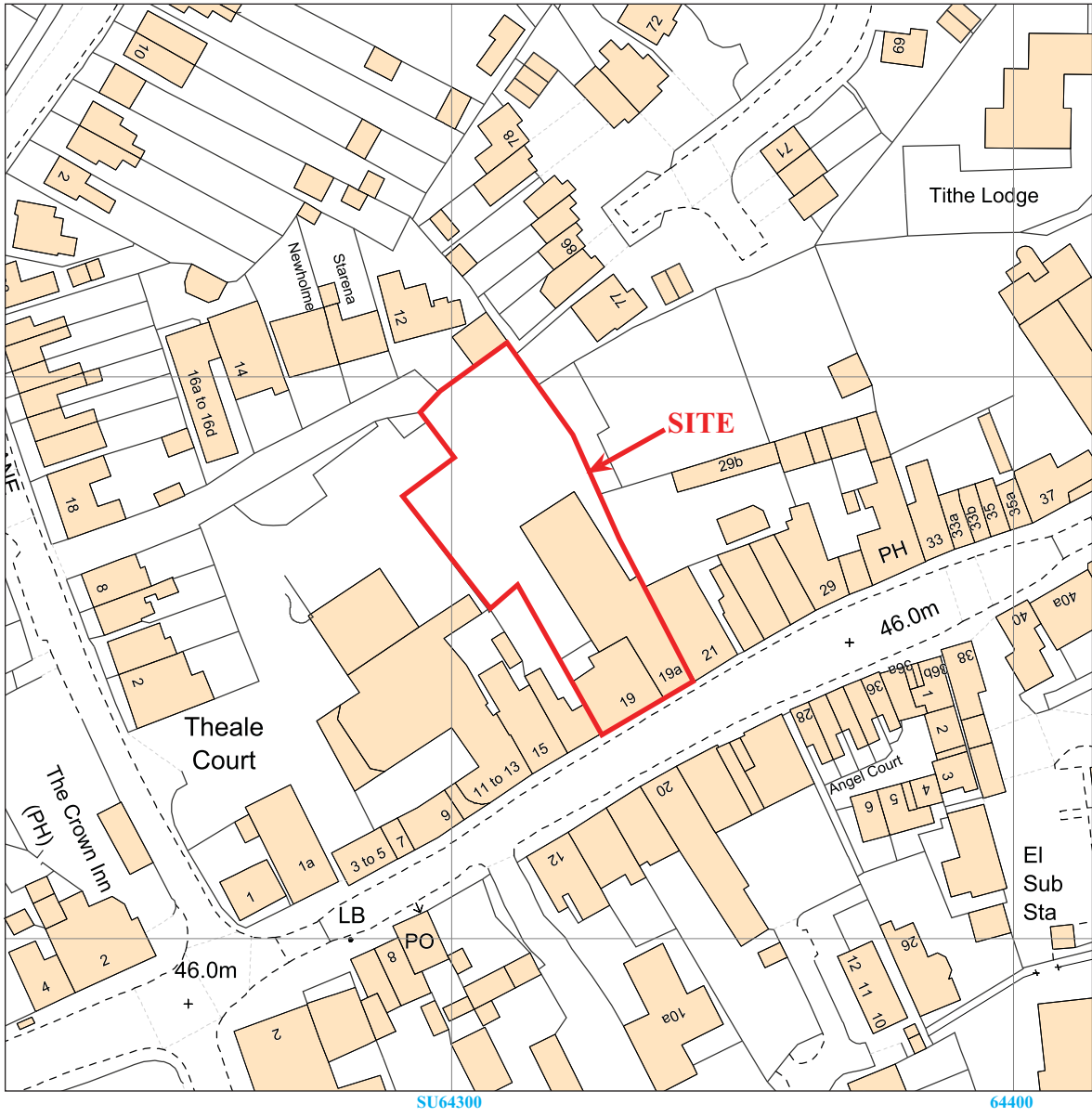


**19 and 19a High Street, Theale,
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Figure 1. Location of site within Theale and Berkshire.

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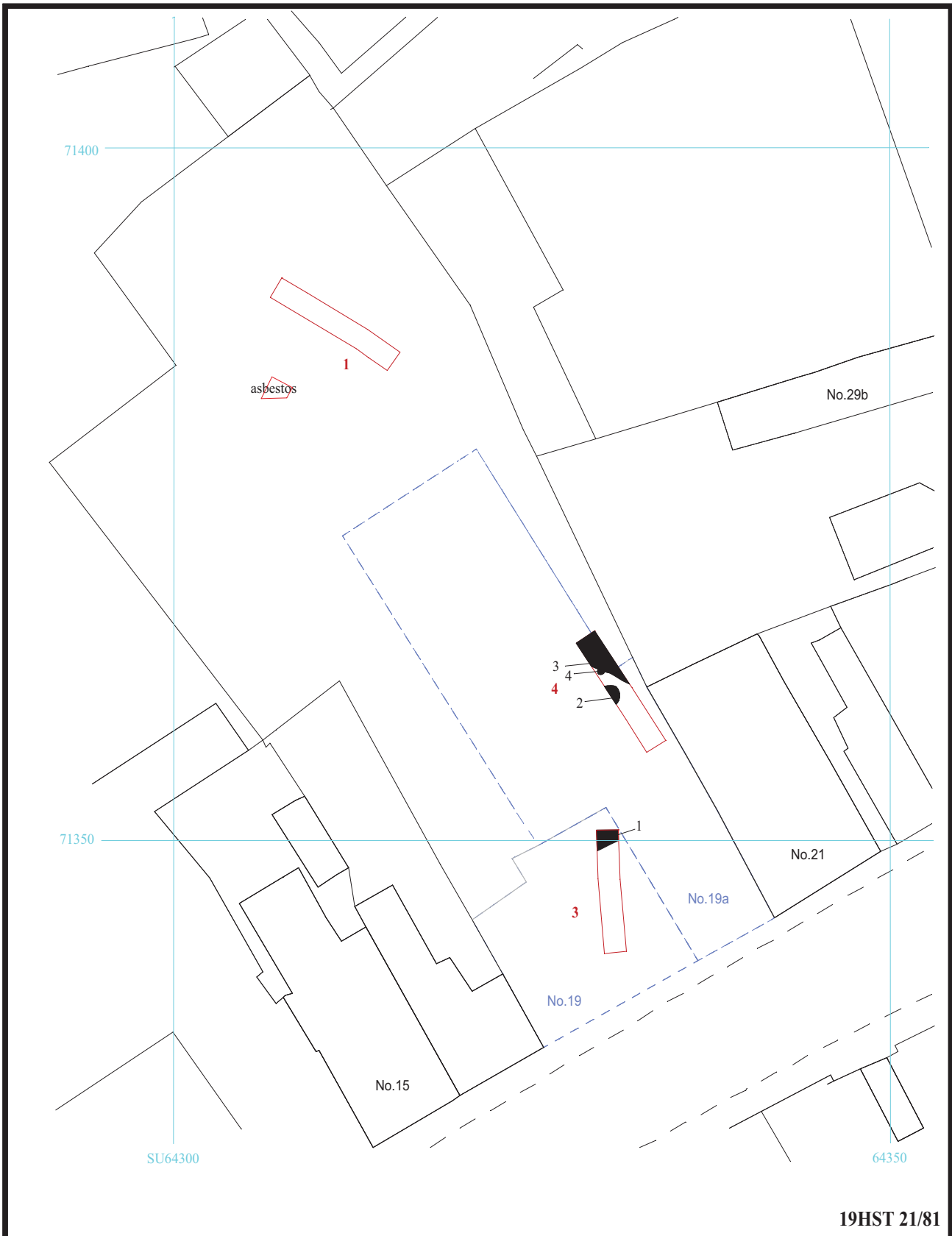
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**19 and 19a High Street, Theale,
West Berkshire, 2021**
Archaeological Desk-based Assessment
 Figure 2. Detailed location of site off High Street.

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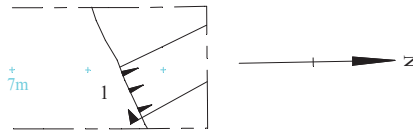


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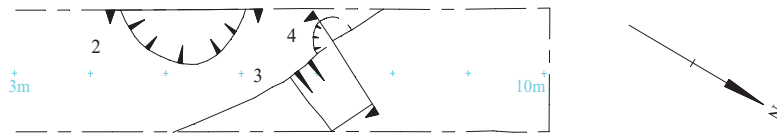
Figure 3. Location of trenches.



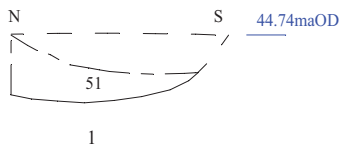
Trench 3



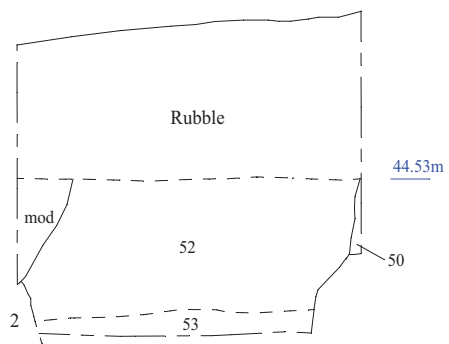
Trench 4



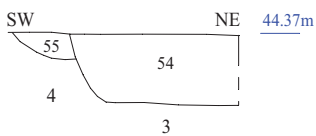
Trench 3



Trench 4



Trench 4



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19 and 19a High Street, Theale,
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Figure 4. Plans and sections from Trenches 3 and 4.



Plate 1. Site, looking South East.



Plate 2. Trench 1, looking North West,
Scales: horizontal 2m and 1m, vertical 0.3m.

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**19 and 19a High Street, Theale,
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Plates 1 and 2.**

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Plate 3. Trench 3, looking North,
Scales: horizontal 2m and 1m, vertical 0.3m.



Plate 4. Trench 4, looking North West,
Scales: horizontal 2m and 1m, vertical 0.3m.

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**19 and 19a High Street, Theale,
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Plates 3 and 4.**

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Plate 5. Trench 4, pit 2, looking West,
Scales: 1m and 0.3m.



Plate 6. Trench 4, pits 3 and 4, looking North West,
Scales: 1m and 0.3m.

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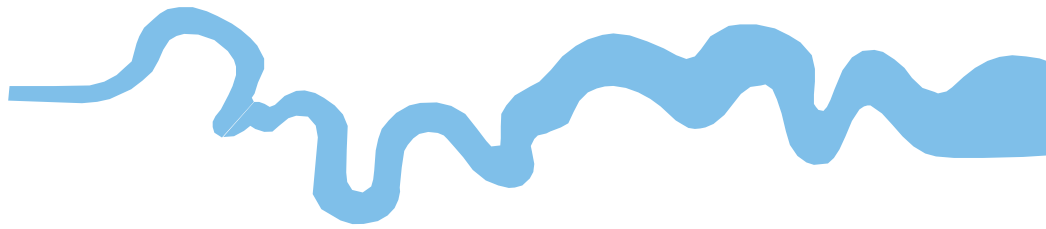
19 and 19a High Street, Theale,
West Berkshire, 2021
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Plates 5 and 6.

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TIME CHART

	Calendar Years
Modern _____	AD 1901
Victorian _____	AD 1837
Post Medieval _____	AD 1500
Medieval _____	AD 1066
Saxon _____	AD 410
Roman _____	AD 43 AD 0 BC
Iron Age _____	750 BC
Bronze Age: Late _____	1300 BC
Bronze Age: Middle _____	1700 BC
Bronze Age: Early _____	2100 BC
Neolithic: Late	3300 BC
Neolithic: Early	4300 BC
Mesolithic: Late	6000 BC
Mesolithic: Early	10000 BC
Palaeolithic: Upper	30000 BC
Palaeolithic: Middle	70000 BC
Palaeolithic: Lower	2,000,000 BC





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