

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**Land at Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge School,
Sonning Common, Oxfordshire**

Archaeological Evaluation

by Andy Taylor

Site Code: MEC18/229

(SU 7025 7985)

**Land at Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge School,
Sonning Common, Oxfordshire**

**An Archaeological Evaluation
for Deanfield Homes Limited**

by Andy Taylor

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code MEC 18/229

October 2022

Summary

Site name: Land at Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge School, Sonning Common, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SU 7025 7985

Site activity: Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 28th-30th September 2022

Project coordinator: David Sanchez

Site supervisor: Andy Taylor

Site code: MEC 18/229

Area of site: c.1.8ha

Summary of results: The evaluation revealed few features of note but a possible kiln of 13th-15th century date was identified in Trench 4 along with a 19th century gully in Trench 10.

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

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

Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford ✓ 05.10.22 Steve Preston ✓ 05.10.22

Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge School, Sonning Common, Oxfordshire An Archaeological Evaluation

by Andy Taylor

Report 18/229c

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge School, Sonning Common, Oxfordshire (SU 7025 7985) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Andrew Harvey, of Deanfield Homes Limited, Oakingham House, Kingsmead Business Park, Fredrick Place, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, HP11 1JU.

Planning permission has been sought from South Oxfordshire District Council for a residential development. An archaeological evaluation has been requested in order to inform the planning process. This is in accordance with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2021), and the District Council's policies on archaeology. This was to take the form of a geophysical survey and trial trenching. The geophysical survey has been reported on separately (Cicu 2022) and this report deals with the trenching component of the evaluation. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Steven Weaver, Planning Archaeologist with Oxfordshire County Archaeology Service. The fieldwork was undertaken by Andy Taylor between the 28th and 30th September 2022 and the site code is MEC 18/229. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on the western side of Sonning Common (Fig. 1), which lies approximately 6.5km north of Reading, Berkshire. It is bounded by Reade's Lane to the north and Kidmore Lane to the south with residential properties to the east and school buildings to the west. The site itself comprises school playing fields (Fig. 2) on a gently sloping parcel of land that lies at a height of 89m above Ordnance Datum in the east rising to 92m aOD to the west. The underlying geology of the site is mapped as Winter Hill Gravel (7th terrace) (BGS 2000), which along with sandy silts, was observed in the trenches.

Archaeological background

The site's archaeological background has been highlighted in a desk-based assessment (Baljikas 2019). The site lies within a zone of the county which has recorded only a modest range of sites and finds. A coin hoard is recorded to the north and various Neolithic flint and stone tools are also noted. Several recent archaeological evaluations have also returned negative results (e.g., Taylor 2019a), though one did recover a Neolithic flaked flint axe head (Foster 2021). Other recent development-led archaeological fieldwork has revealed a number of new sites in Sonning Common with Roman occupation and a probable kiln site at Blounts Court (Beaverstock 2019) and possible Roman or Medieval occupation at Little Sparrows (Taylor 2019b). Further afield early Neolithic occupation has been identified at Woodcote (Sanchez 2021). The environs of the site are, however, notable for the presence of findspots of Palaeolithic date intimately associated with the sequence of older gravel terraces of the Thames, especially so an ancient channel that flowed from Caversham to Clacton-on-Sea via St Albans (Wymer 1968; Morigi *et al.* 2011). The channel lies to the south and the gravel deposit on which the site lies is less well known for Palaeolithic findspots.

The geophysical evaluation on the site (Cicu 2022) had revealed a small number of positive linear anomalies which may be associated with land division, and a number of positive discrete anomalies which may indicate the presence of buried pit-type features (Fig. 4).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the area of development.

Specific aims of the project were;

- to determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present;
- to determine if the geophysical anomalies are of archaeological origin; and
- to provide information to allow the preparation of a mitigation strategy if necessary.

It was proposed to dig 13 trenches, each measuring 1.8m wide and 25m long in order to target the footprints of the proposed new buildings as well as the geophysical anomalies. These were dug using a JCB type machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision. All spoilheaps were monitored for finds. Any identified archaeological deposits would be investigated by hand to an agreed sampling fraction, in order to address the aims outlined above.

Results

In the event, twelve trenches were opened (Fig. 3) measuring 1.80m wide, between 28m and 30.70m long and between 0.24m and 0.37m deep. One intended trench could not be dug due to a building still in use and Trench 5 had to be repositioned due to a playground still being used. A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

Trench 1

This trench was aligned approximately NW-SE and measured 28m long and 0.37m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.18m of topsoil overlying 0.16m of subsoil overlying sandy gravel natural geology.

Trench 2

This trench was aligned East-West and measured 29.40m long and 0.33m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.21m of topsoil overlying 0.10m of subsoil overlying sandy silt and gravel natural geology.

Trench 3

This trench was aligned NE-SW and measured 30m long and 0.29m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.20m of topsoil overlying 0.09m of subsoil overlying sandy silt and gravel natural geology.

Trench 4 (Fig. 5); Pls 1 and 2)

This trench was aligned approximately NW-SE and measured 30.40m long and 0.37m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.22m of topsoil overlying 0.15m of subsoil overlying sandy silt and gravel natural geology. At 10m from the south-east end of the trench was an area of scorched clay and as a result of this the trench was widened in this area. This showed a darker area next to the clay into which a slot was dug. The clay area (2) measured 0.78m wide, 0.16m deep and its mid brown red clay fill (53) produced seven pieces of tile. It was cut by a pit or possible kiln (3) which was dug to a depth of 0.45m. This was stopped at a solid, light brown red, baked clay layer (56) that could be part of kiln structure. Above this were two other fills (54 and 55) with 54 being a dark grey black sandy silt layer that contained a sherd of medieval pottery and 25 pieces of tile. Fill 55 was a light yellow brown silty sand which did not contain any dating evidence.

Trench 5

This trench was aligned North-South and measured 29.80m long and 0.24m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.16m of topsoil overlying 0.08m of subsoil overlying sandy gravel natural geology.

Trench 6

This trench was aligned North-South and measured 30.50m long and 0.28m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.16m of topsoil overlying sandy silt and gravel natural geology. A large area of magnetic disturbance noted in the geophysical survey (interpreted as the presence of metallic objects) had left no below-ground trace in the trench.

Trench 7

This trench was aligned approximately NW–SE and measured 30.40m long and 0.30m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.20m of topsoil overlying 0.17m of subsoil overlying sandy silt and gravel natural.

Trench 8

This trench was aligned NE–SW and measured 29.70m long and 0.36m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.23m of topsoil overlying 0.13m of subsoil overlying sandy silt and gravel natural geology.

Trench 9

This trench was aligned approximately East-West and measured 30.70m long and 0.31m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.20m of topsoil overlying 0.11m of subsoil overlying sandy silt and gravel natural geology.

Trench 10 (Fig. 5; Pls 3 and 4)

This trench was aligned approximately NW-SE and measured 30.30m long and 0.31m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.22m of topsoil overlying 0.10m of subsoil overlying sandy silt and gravel natural geology. A gully was located at the north-western end of the trench into which a slot (1) was dug. This measured 0.52m wide, 0.10m deep and its light red brown sand silt fill (52) produced a piece of likely 19th-century glass and a piece of coal.

Trench 11

This trench was aligned approximately NE–SW and measured 29.70m long and 0.30m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.20m of topsoil overlying 0.10m of subsoil overlying sandy silt and gravel natural geology.

Trench 12

This trench was aligned East-West and measured 30m long and 0.26m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.16m of topsoil overlying 0.10m of subsoil overlying silty gravel natural geology.

Finds

Pottery by Cristina Mateos Leal

The evaluation resulted in the recovery of a single sherd of pottery weighing 38g, from a pit or kiln 3 (54) and dating to the medieval period (Appendix 3). The coarseware sherd was wheel made with a slightly sagging base, made from a hard sandy fabric with abundant well sorted rounded quartz (1mm) with some polycrystalline quartz inclusions and with an orange reddish core and black surfaces. It is unglazed.

The sherd would fit in the quartz tradition of Medieval Oxford wares between 13th-14th centuries, but probably from a local maker.

Ceramic Building Material by Danielle Milbank

A total of 32 fragments of tile weighing 1.199kg were recovered in the course of the evaluation, hand-collected from two contexts in trench 4 (Appendix 4). The pieces were examined under x10 magnification and categorized where possible based on dimensions, fabric and finish.

Material recovered from pit 2 (53) included a piece of roof tile in a medium hard clay with moderate, fairly well-sorted medium sized quartz sand, a mid orange buff colour, light grey core, and thickness of 12mm. The edges are thickened and the base is sandy and irregular, and the edge of the fragment is gently concave, with the thinnest part of the tile at the centre 6mm thick. This is suggestive of a tile which would not be usable. Further pieces from the same context are of a similar fabric, hard and a dark red and dark grey red colour, with some banding, indicating reduced oxygen conditions and over-firing. These range in thickness from 10mm to 13mm and are fairly uneven and are likely to represent waste from tile production.

Pieces from pit or kiln 3 (54) are in the same fabric described above, with moderate fairly well sorted rounded medium-sized quartz sand inclusions and can be divided into two main groups according to firing. A total of 13 of the fragments are pale orange red to buff orange, all with a slightly uneven finish. Thickness ranges from 9mm to 14mm, with edge thickening present on several fragments, and peg holes are present on three examples. The context contained a further 12 pieces (including two pairs of co-joining fragments) which have faults (heat cracking, extra material where clay excess has fused to a tile), are overfired, or have been made too thick or too thin. The overfired pieces include a fragment with a peg hole, which has been fired to a very dark blue grey, and further fragments which have dark blue grey and dark red grey banding. Overall these vary in thickness from 10mm to 13mm and have an irregular finish with edge-thickening on some examples.

Conclusion

The ceramic building material represents peg-type roof tiles only, with no other brick or tile forms present, and overall the material is likely to date to the 13th to 15th centuries, based on the form and thickness of the tiles. The presence of over-fired examples, and other material showing flaws and cracks, is suggestive of at least some of the pieces representing waster material from the tile production process. Several pieces were recovered which are extremely hard and overfired and could represent tiles used to form part of the structure of a kiln. Typically, such material is not transported a great distance even if reused, and the context of these fragments associated with *in situ* burning is suggestive of tile production on the site or very nearby.

Fired Clay by Danielle Milbank

Fired clay weighing 106g (27 fragments) was recovered from a sieved soil sample from hearth/kiln or pit feature 2 (53), and hand collected from adjacent feature 3 (54). The material was highly fragmented, and no pieces were recovered with characteristics such as wattle marks indicating the type of structure from which they were derived.

The pieces from pit/ hearth 2 (53) comprised a slightly soft and friable clay with a rough texture, occasional fine voids, and sparse quartz sand inclusions. The material is largely orange red, with one piece having a grey surface on one side, indicating the surface was fired in reducing conditions.

Material from feature 3 (54) comprises three small pieces in a similar fabric, softer and a paler orange colour, suggestive of lower temperature firing.

Glass by Danielle Milbank

A fragment of dark green bottle glass (4g) was recovered from gully slot 1 (52). It is of broadly post-medieval date, more likely in the later part (19th century) of this range.

Charred Plant Remains by Jo Pine

A single soil sample was taken from pit 2. The sample was floated and wet sieved using a 0.25mm sieve and air dried and the flot was retained to be examined under a hand lens and microscope at magnifications between x8 and x60. No charred plant macrofossils were present. A small amount of charcoal was present, however, this material was of size and structure that does not allow species identification.

Conclusion

The evaluation was successfully carried out although one had trench (Tr. 5) had to be repositioned and another could not be dug due to a building still being in use.

A possible kiln feature was recorded in Trench 4, but not obviously corresponding with any geophysical anomalies (Fig. 4) though two ferrous magnetic spike were identified by the geophysical survey. This kiln-like feature was dated to the 13th-15th century and may represent a tile kiln, based on the material recovered.

References

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APPENDIX 1: Trench details

0m at S or W end

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	28.00	1.60	0.37	0-0.18m topsoil; 0.18m-0.34m subsoil; 0.34m-0.37m+ sandy gravel natural geology.
2	29.40	1.60	0.33	0-0.21m topsoil; 0.21m-0.31m subsoil; 0.31m-0.33m+ sandy silt and gravel natural geology.
3	30.00	1.60	0.29	0-0.20m topsoil; 0.20m-0.29m subsoil; 0.29m+ sandy silt and gravel natural geology.
4	30.40	1.60	0.37	0-0.22m topsoil; 0.22m-0.37m subsoil; 0.37m+ sandy silt and gravel natural geology. Pit/Kiln 2 and 3. [Pls 1 and 2]
5	29.80	1.60	0.24	0-0.16m topsoil; 0.16m-0.24m subsoil; 0.24m+ sandy gravel natural geology.
6	30.50	1.60	0.28	0-0.16m topsoil; 0.16m-0.26m subsoil; 0.26m-0.28m+ sandy silt and gravel natural geology.
7	30.40	1.60	0.30	0-0.20m topsoil; 0.20m-0.27m subsoil; 0.27m-0.30m+ sandy silt and gravel natural geology.
8	29.70	1.60	0.36	0-0.23m topsoil; 0.23m-0.36m subsoil; 0.36m+ sandy silt and gravel natural geology.
9	30.70	1.60	0.31	0-0.20m topsoil; 0.20m-0.31m subsoil; 0.31m+ sandy silt and gravel natural geology.
10	30.30	1.60	0.32	0-0.22m topsoil; 0.22m-0.32m subsoil; 0.32m+ sandy silt and gravel natural geology. Gully 1. [Pls 3 and 4]
11	29.70	1.60	0.30	0-0.20m topsoil; 0.20m-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ sandy silt and gravel natural geology.
12	30.00	1.60	0.26	0-0.16m topsoil; 0.16m-0.26m subsoil; 0.26m+ sandy silt and gravel natural geology.

APPENDIX 2: Feature details

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
4	2	53	Pit/Kiln		
4	3	54, 55, 56	Pit/Kiln		
10	1	52	Gully	Post Medieval	Glass, Coal

APPENDIX 3: Catalogue of Pottery

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Wt (g)</i>	<i>Date</i>
4	3	54	1	38	13th-14 century

APPENDIX 4: Catalogue of Ceramic Building Material

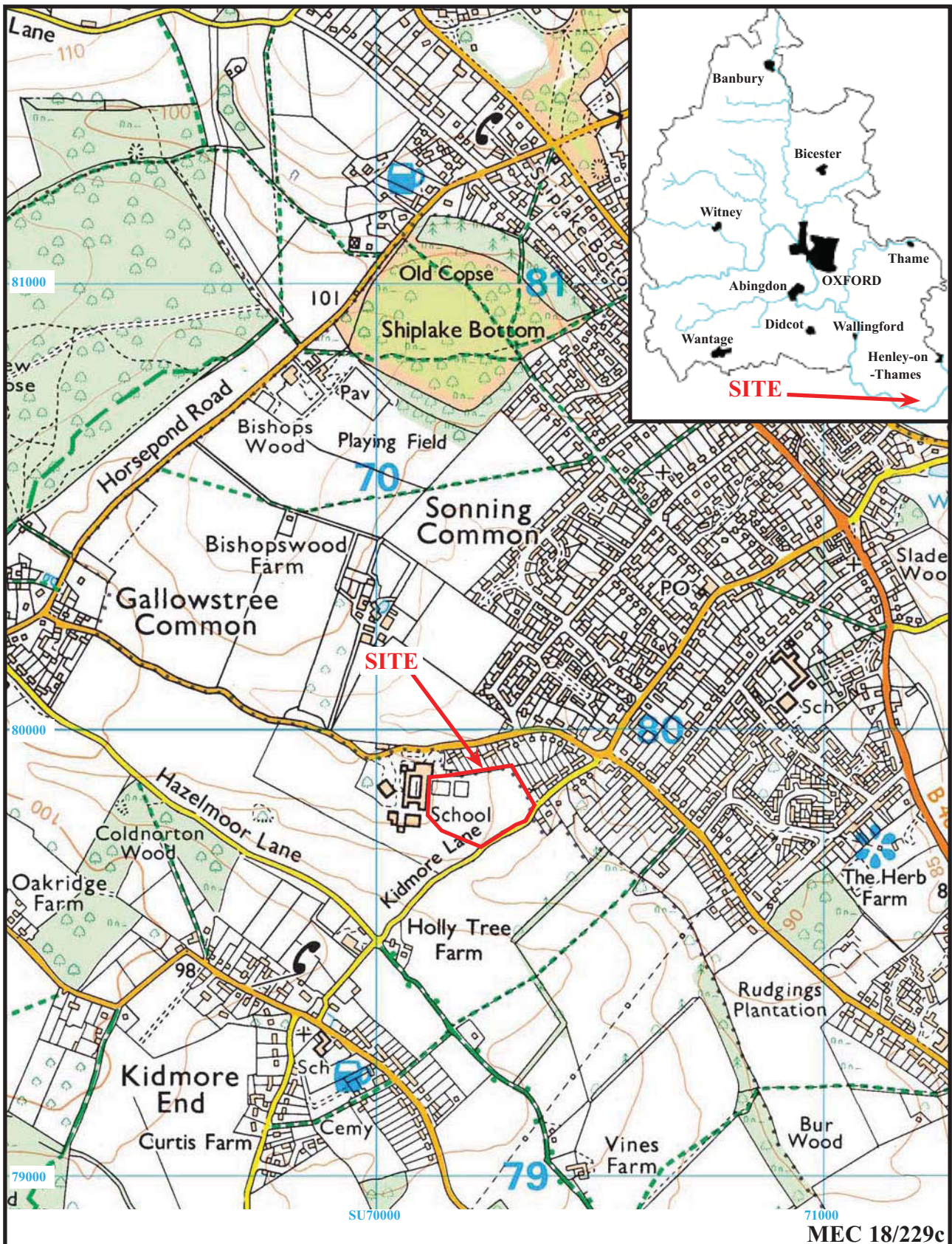
<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt (g)</i>
4	2	53	Pit/hearth	7	249
4	3	54	Pit/kiln	25	950

APPENDIX 5: Catalogue of Fired Clay

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt (g)</i>
4	2	53	Pit/heath	24	83
4	3	54	Pit/kiln	3	23

APPENDIX 6: Catalogue of Glass

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Wt (g)</i>
10	1	52	1	4

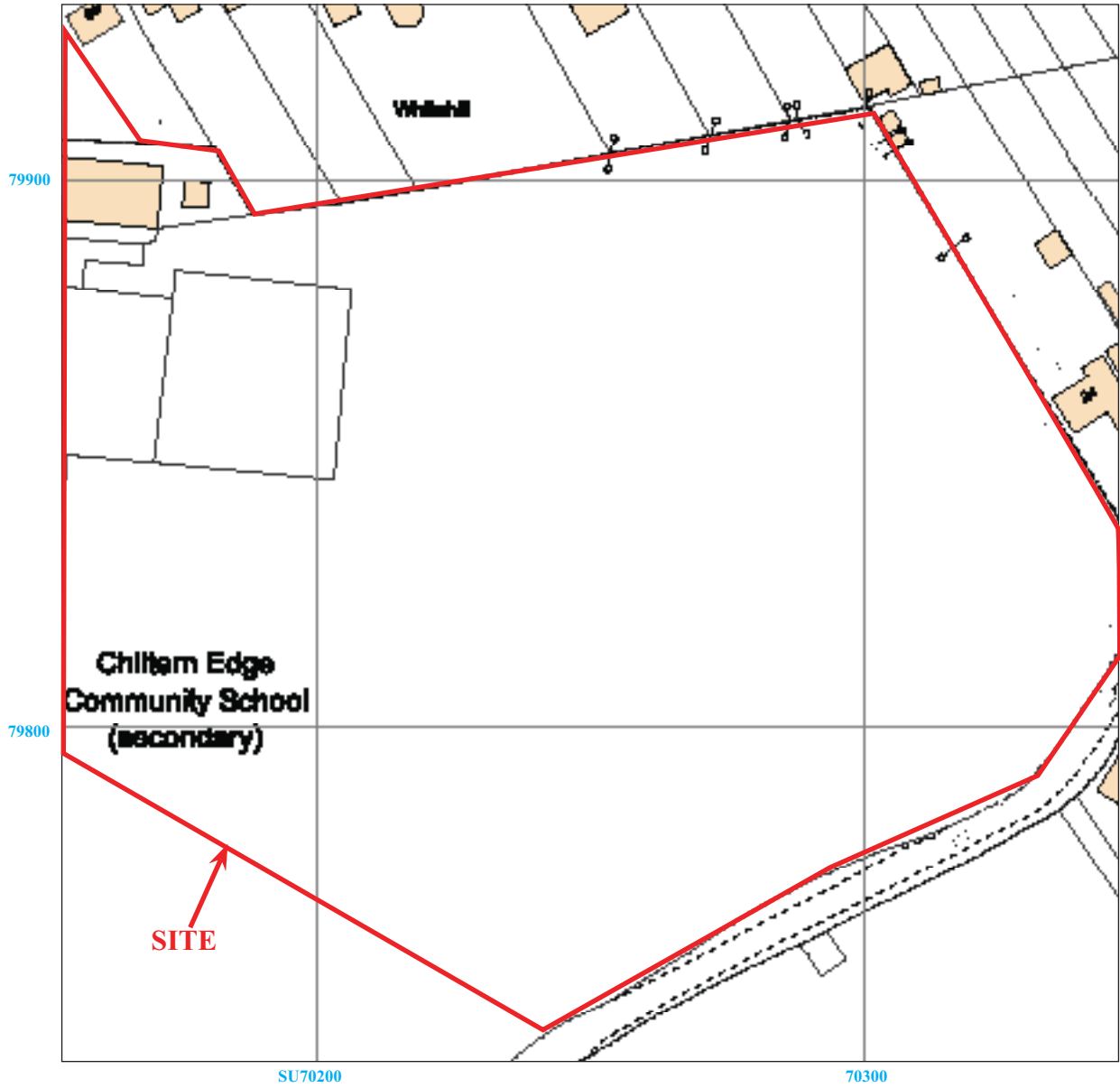


**Land at Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge,
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Figure 1. Location of site within Sonning Common and Oxfordshire.

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Figure 2. Detailed location of site.

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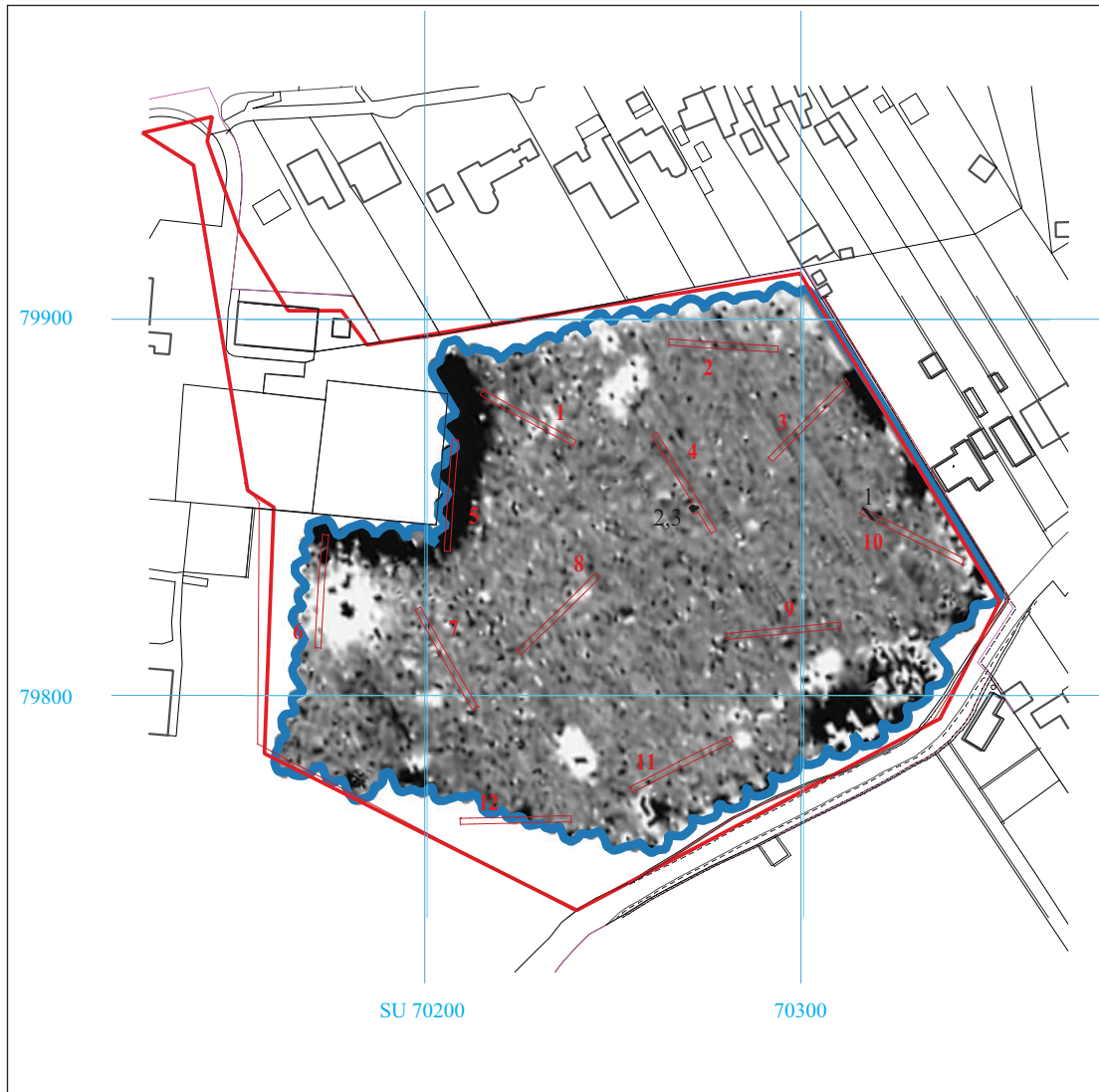
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Figure 3. Location of trenches.



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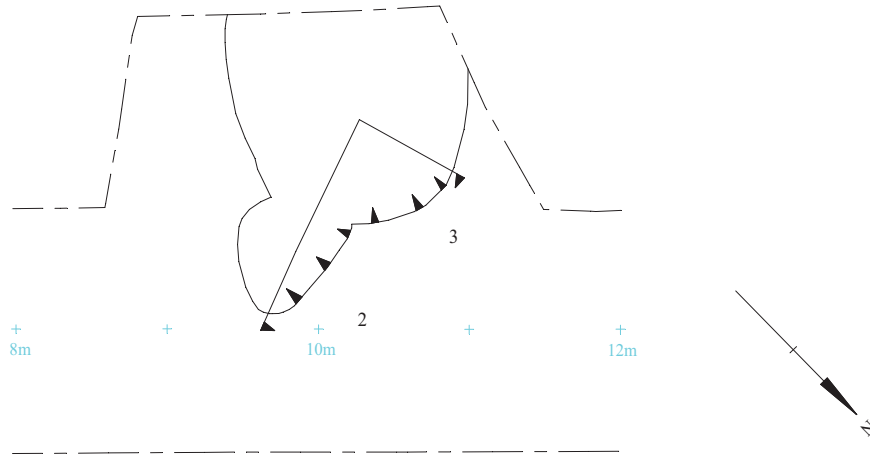
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Archaeological Evaluation**

Figure 4. Detailed location of site with geophysical survey interpretation plot (after Cicu 2022, fig. 4).

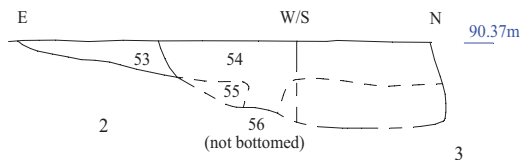
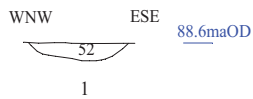
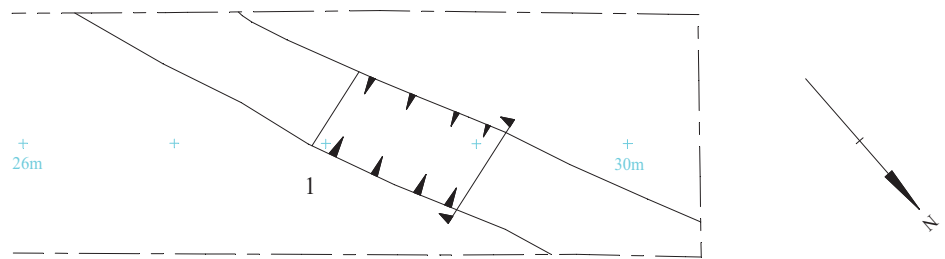
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Trench 4



Trench 10



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Figure 4. Details from Trench 4 and Trench 10.



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



Plate 2. Possible kiln (cut 2 and 3), looking West, Scales: horizontal 1m and 0.5m, vertical 0.3m.

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**Land at Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge,
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Plates 1 and 2.**

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Plate 3. Trench 10, looking North West, Scales: horizontal 2m and 1m, vertical 0.3m.



Plate 4. Trench 10, Gully 1, looking North, Scales: horizontal 0.5m, vertical 0.1m.

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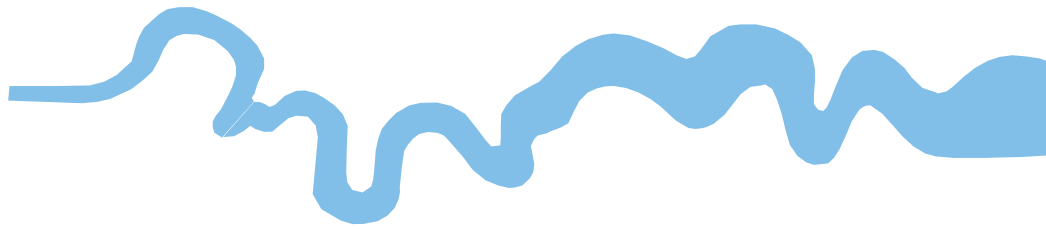
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Archaeological Evaluation
Plates 3 and 4.**

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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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