

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**NEA Site, Aylesbury Waterside, Walton Street,
Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire**

Archaeological Evaluation

by Andrew Weale

Site Code: AWB10/27

(SP 8215 1350)

**NEA Site, Aylesbury Waterside, Walton Street,
Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire**

**An Archaeological Evaluation
for Aylesbury Vale District Council**

by Andrew Weale
Thames Valley Archaeological Services
Ltd

Site Code AWB10/27

March 2011

Summary

Site name: NEA Site, Aylesbury Waterside, Walton Street, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire

Grid reference: SP 8215 1350

Site activity: Archaeological Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 14th–17th March 2011

Project manager: Andrew Weale

Site supervisor: Andrew Weale

Site code: AWB 10/27

Area of site: c. 0.39ha

Summary of results: No pre-modern archaeological features were encountered during the evaluation. Building foundations of late 19th- or 20th-century date were discovered, which appear on various editions of the Ordnance Survey maps of the site. Underlying deep alluvial deposits appeared to represent overbank flooding deposits with evidence of organic preservation which was dated to the late 17th to 19th centuries. No evidence of palaeochannels or water management features were encountered. On the basis of these results the site does not appear to have any archaeological potential.

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

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Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford ✓ 23.03.11
	Steve Preston ✓ 23.03.11

NEA Site Aylesbury Waterside, Walton Street, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire An Archaeological Evaluation

by Andrew Weale

Report 10/27b

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out on the NEA Site, Aylesbury Waterside, Walton Street, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire (SP 8215 1350) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr James McMyllor of Mace Limited, Atelier House, 64 Pratt Street, London, NW1 0LF on behalf of Aylesbury Vale District Council.

Planning permission (App 10/02567/ADC) has been sought for the development of the Waterside area for educational use. The results of the archaeological evaluation are to be submitted as part of the planning application in order to inform the planning process with regard to its impact on below-ground heritage assets. The information could then be used to design an appropriate mitigation strategy if necessary.

This is in accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government's Planning Policy Statement, *Planning for the Historic Environment* (PPS5 2010), and the District Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Eliza Alqassar, Archaeological Planning and Conservation Officer of Buckingham County Archaeological Services. The fieldwork was undertaken by Andrew Weale, Jacqueline Pitt and Matt Gittins between 14th and 17th March 2011, and the site code is AWB 10/27. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Buckinghamshire County Museum in due course.

A previous desk-based assessment has been carried out for the site (Hopkins 2010). In summary the proximity of Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman, Saxon and medieval settlement sites suggest that this area may be rich in activity of any or all of those periods. The cartographic and historic evidence demonstrates that the majority of the site has been developed and redeveloped during recent history, finally with recent demolition of structures. The location of an electricity depot and the requirements of such an establishment in the way of groundworks and cabling, mean that the ground, and any underlying archaeologically relevant levels, will almost certainly have been disturbed, perhaps significantly so in some areas. However, the location of the site in close proximity to watercourses and the absence of development on at least parts of the site mean that it is likely that archaeologically relevant levels will have survived and that if deposits of archaeological interest are present, then these may be waterlogged and potentially provide a wealth of palaeoenvironmental and economic data. The

Aylesbury branch of the Grand Union Canal and the canal basin are the most prominent features in the post-medieval landscape. The canal edge forms the boundary of the proposal site. There were no surviving above-ground heritage assets on the site itself, although the canal is considered to be a heritage asset.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located to the south of the historic centre of Aylesbury and to the north-west of Walton. The site occupies an irregular parcel of land and covers an area of *c.* 0.39ha (Fig. 1), bounded to the north by the Bear Brooke, to the east by a car park, to the south by a canal, office buildings and canal basin, and to the west by Walton Street (Fig. 2). The site was formerly a car park and contractor's compound for the building of the Waterside Theatre. The banks of the Bear Brook have been landscaped with the addition of a pond along its length. The site is mainly located on recent and Holocene/Pleistocene alluvium, which overlies Jurassic Kimmeridge Clay (including Hartwell Clay) (BGS 1990). Flat lying alluvial deposits overlying gravel were observed within all the excavated trenches beneath the alluvium and was considered to be a natural deposit. Kimmeridge clay was not observed within any trench. The site is at a height of approximately 77.5m above Ordnance Datum.

Archaeological background

Aylesbury, in general, has a rich and varied archaeological sequence spanning periods from the Mesolithic to the later post-medieval and this has recently been comprehensively synthesized (BCC 2009). The town's origins are thought to lie in the Saxon period which is corroborated by its mention in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles. However earlier activity is well represented. An Iron Age hillfort had been identified in the town, which was later reused, enclosing the Minster church (Blair 1994). The proposal site is also located close to Walton, now a suburb of the town. Extensive fieldwork in this area has revealed evidence of prehistoric activity in the form of Mesolithic struck flints through to Bronze Age refuse pits, structures and cremations (Farley 2010, fig. 4.16).

Roman activity is less well recorded for the town with the majority of entries in the county Historic Environment Record relating to stray find spots, such as for coins, from various locations. The projected route of the Akeman Street Roman road, which connected St Albans to Alchester, is thought to pass to the north-west of the site. Again, fieldwork in the Walton area has identified Roman activity in the form of boundary ditches or field systems (Farley 1994).

Various investigations and chance observations have taken place on Walton Street and within Walton revealing, most importantly, a notable range of deposits of Saxon date, but with both earlier and later periods also represented. Fieldwork carried out some distance to the south of the site on Walton Street revealed a range of occupation deposits including pits, ditches and postholes. Many of these were individually poorly dated but others were clearly of Saxon, medieval and post-medieval date (AS 2005). Extensive excavations at The Orchard in Walton examined at least ten buildings of mid-Saxon date (Ford and Howell 2004) to go with a further six sunken-floored buildings discovered previously to the south (Farley 1994). An archaeological evaluation (AS 2006) on the site of the new theatre complex adjacent to the site revealed a deep sequence of alluvial deposits including a possible meander of the Bear Brook. A small amount of medieval pottery close to the Bear Brook were recorded as were post-medieval features. An evaluation immediately to the east of the site revealed modern buildings and flat lying alluvial deposits but no pre-modern archaeological deposits (Weale 2010).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/ absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological or palaeoenvironmental deposits within the area of development. This work was to be carried out in a manner which would not compromise the integrity of archaeological features or deposits which might warrant preservation *in-situ*, or might better be excavated under conditions pertaining to full excavation.

The specific research aims of this project 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 late Prehistoric occupation is present on the site;
- to determine if any Saxon occupation is present on the site; and
- to determine if there are any water management features present on the site and if so what is their date and nature.

It was proposed to excavate four trenches 10m long and all 1.6m wide. Tarmac and overburden/made ground were removed by an 180⁰ backhoe (JCB-type) machine fitted with a ditching bucket, under continuous archaeological supervision, to expose archaeologically sensitive levels. Where archaeological features are certainly or probably present, the stripped areas were to be cleaned using appropriate hand tools. Sufficient of the archaeological features and deposits exposed would be excavated or sampled by hand to satisfy the aims of the brief.

Results

Due to the presence on site of other contractors moving or replacing existing services, the final positions of the trenches were confirmed on site by Ms Alqassar and reduced from four to three (Fig. 2). Trench 2 was excavated as intended. Trench 1 was reduced from 10m to 6m excavated at full depth due to the presence of an electricity cable within the trench. Trench 3 was reduced from 10m to 8.60m due to collapse of the sides so that it was deemed to be unsafe to continue. All the changes to the proposed trench layout were undertaken with the agreement of Ms Alqassar and Mr Kidd of Buckinghamshire Archaeological Service. The excavated trenches varied from 8.60m to 10.10m long and in depth from 2.70m to 3.30m deep. All were 1.6m wide and all were aligned SW–NE.

A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

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

Trench 1 was 10m long and 2.70m deep. The stratigraphy within Trench 1 was 0.08m of concrete, beneath which was 0.32m of made ground (scalpins) overlying 0.30m of black cinders and coal waste (51). Beneath 51 was mixed brick, tile and mortar demolition rubble (52) (not collected) up to 0.40m thick. Within this layer, 6m from the south-western end of the trench was an electricity cable diagonally across the trench within a cast iron pipe. The north-eastern 4m of the trench were not excavated below this point to preserve the modern service. Beneath 52 was mixed green/blue/grey clay (53) with modern brick, tile and coal (not collected) up to 0.50m thick. This overlay blue/grey alluvial clay (54) up to 0.50m thick. Within this layer beneath the electricity cable was a lens of peaty clay (50) increasing in thickness to the north-east. Beneath 54 was yellow/brown alluvial clay (55) up to 0.60m thick which overlay clean yellow/brown gravel natural geology.

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

Trench 2 was 10.2m long and 2.80m deep. The stratigraphy was 0.10m of concrete, on 0.20m of made ground (brick rubble). Beneath the brick rubble was 0.16m of black cinders and coal waste (56). Beneath 56 was mixed gravel and concrete hard-standing/surface (57) up to 0.04m thick on top of a layer of gravel (58) with bitumen up to 0.03m thick. Beneath 58 was further gravel and concrete hard-standing (59) up to 0.03m thick. Beneath 59 was a mixed bluish gravel layer (60) with brick, up to 0.27m thick. Beneath 60 was blue grey alluvial clay (61) up to 0.73m thick. Beneath 61 was dark brown clay (50) with peat up to 0.20m thick. Layer 50 contained brick,

tile and pottery dated from the late 17th to 19th centuries. Beneath 50 was blue grey alluvial clay (62) up to 0.60m thick. Beneath 62 was yellow brown alluvial clay (63) up to 0.60m thick. Beneath 63 was blue gravel natural geology.

Trench 3 (Fig. 2; Pl.3)

Trench 3 was 8.6m long and 3.30m deep. The top of the stratigraphy within Trench 3 was 0.25m of gravel and grey silt. Beneath the gravel entering the trench 7.10m from the south-west end and aligned NW–SE was a brick wall 0.30m wide, which turned through 30° to a north to south line across the trench then turned through 60° to form the edge of the trench to the south-west. At 0.45m to the east of this wall was a second wall which followed the same alignment until it returned at the south edge of the trench where it turned 150° to form the edge of the trench to the north-east end. The gap between the two walls was filled with loose rubble and roots. The walls were made of modern frogged bricks stamped MI and bonded with a hard yellow sandy mortar. The walls extended to a depth of 1.70m. The walls cut through a layer of sand and gravel (64) up to 0.25m thick. Beneath 64 was a layer of demolition debris (65) up to 0.30m thick. Beneath 65 was a layer of mixed grey/blue and yellow/brown clay (66). This overlay blue grey alluvial clay (67) up to 0.40m thick. Beneath 67 was dark brown clay (68) with peat up to 0.10m thick. Beneath 68 was dark blue grey alluvial clay (69), contaminated with an oily substance with a malodour, up to 1.50m thick. Beneath (69) was a dark blue stained natural gravel, which turned to clean gravel 0.08m below. It is likely that any differentiation by colour of the alluvial clays towards the base of the trench has been lost by the contamination.

Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 2 sherds with a total weight of 15g. Both were from layer (50), the peaty clay in trench 2, and are of 18th – 19th century date. They were recorded using the coding system of the Milton Keynes Archaeological Unit type-series (cf. Mynard and Zeepvat 1992; Zeepvat *et al.* 1994), as follows:

PM28: *Nottingham/Derby Stoneware*, 18th – 19th century. 1 sherd, 8g

PM56: *Manganese Glazed Earthenware*. Late 17th – 18th century. 1 sherd, 7g.

Both fabrics are very common finds on sites of the period in the region.

Ceramic Building Material by Andrew Weale

Five fragments of ceramic building material weighting a total of 98g were recovered from one context (50). Only one piece was at all diagnostic, that being a fragment of roof tile weighting 70g; this could not be closely dated.

Conclusion

The peaty clay in Trench 2 contained pottery that could be dated to the late 17th to 19th centuries and it is likely that the peaty clay in Trench 3 is of a similar date. The site appears to have been in-filled in the recent past with dumps of made ground overlying the natural alluvial clays. The made ground contains modern brick that can be dated to the latter part of the 19th century or early 20th century. The inclusion of ash and cinder within the made ground suggests, unsurprisingly, that this infilling was associated with the electricity substation that was depicted on the Third Edition Ordnance Survey map onwards.

The brick-built structure in Trench 3 is in a similar position to a building shown on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1899, but disappears by the Ordnance Survey map of 1982.

The layers of made ground directly overlie a sequent of alluvial clay deposits. Trench 2 appeared to show a similar profile to those seen in the canal side car park to the west (Weale 2010). Trenches 2 and 3 showed the additional of a peaty clay layer above the lower alluvial layers with a further layer of alluvium above it. These lower layers could not be dated as they contained no artefacts. The underlying gravel beneath the alluvium appeared to be lying flat except Trench 1 which slightly undulated, but with no evidence of palaeochannels. No evidence of the palaeochannel observed to the north-west of the site on the theatre site was seen (AS 2006). It is considered that the potential of these deposits for palaeoenvironmental reconstruction is at best, modest and of broadly the same character to the deposits examined in detail during evaluation just to the north-west of the proposal site (AS 2009). The results of the evaluation would suggest that the site has, at best, very low archaeological potential.

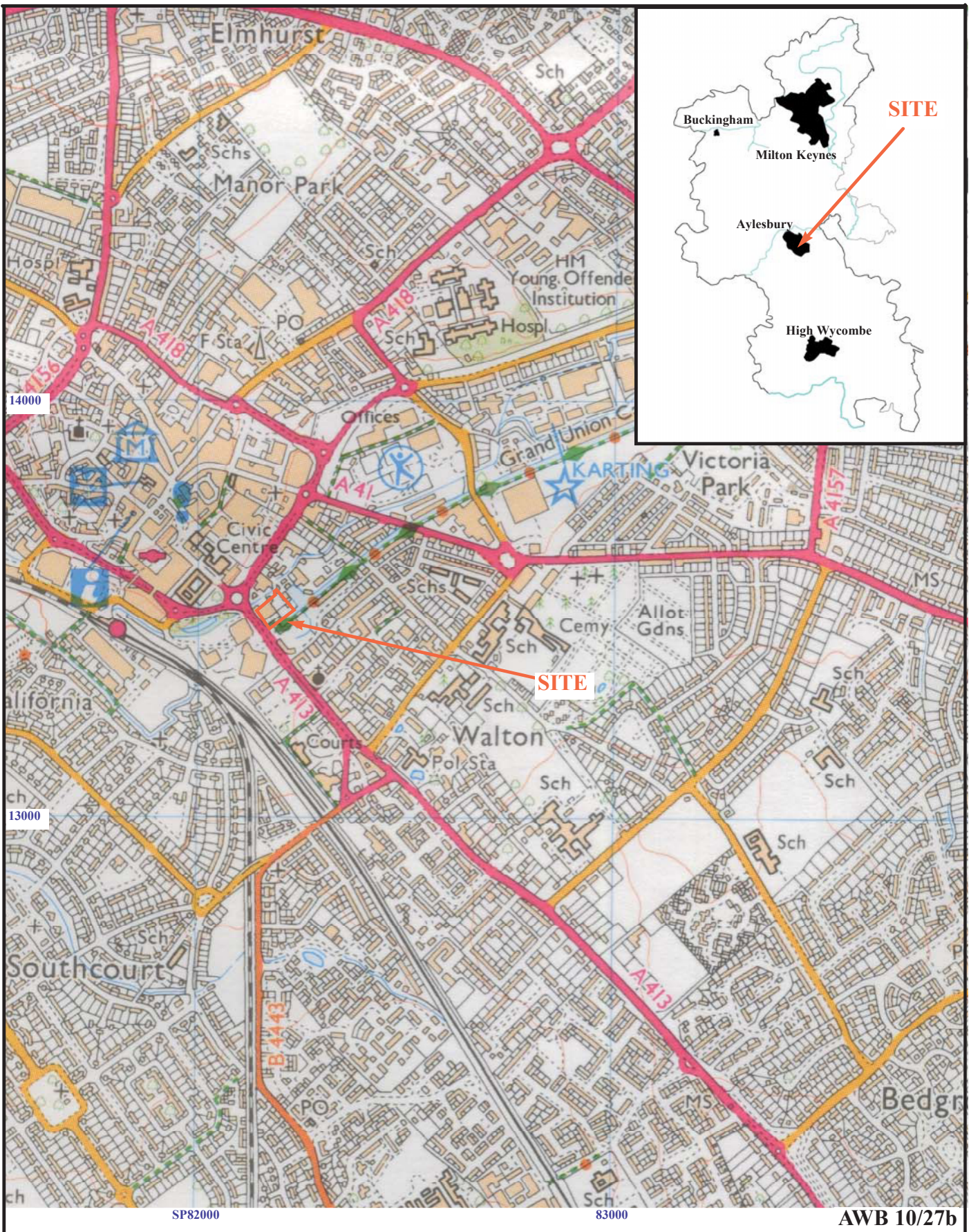
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APPENDIX 1: Trench details
0m at South West end

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	10.0	1.6	2.70	Concrete 0–0.08m; 0.08–0.40m scalpins; 0.40–0.70m made ground; 0.70–1.10m made ground; 1.10–1.60m made ground; 1.60–2.10m blue grey alluvial clay; 2.10–2.70m yellow brown alluvial clay; 2.70m+ clean gravel natural geology (74.96m AOD) [PI. 1]
2	10.20	1.6	2.80	Concrete 0–0.10m; 0.10–0.20m made ground; 0.20–0.36m clinker/ash; 0.36–0.40m gravel/concrete; 0.40–0.43m gravel/bitumen; 0.43–0.46m gravel/concrete; 0.46–0.67m made ground; 0.67–1.40m blue grey alluvial clay; 0.40–1.60m peaty clay; 1.60–2.20m blue grey alluvial clay; 0.20–2.80m yellow brown alluvial clay; 2.80m+ gravel natural geology (74.80m AOD) [PI. 2]
3	8.60	1.6	3.30	Gravel and grey silt 0–0.25m; 0.25–0.50m made ground; 0.50–0.80m made ground; 0.80–1.30m made ground; 1.30–1.70m blue grey alluvial clay; 1.70–1.80m peaty clay; 1.80–3.30m contaminated alluvial clay; 3.30m+ gravel natural geology (74.20m AOD). Brick walls to a depth of 1.70m [PI. 3]

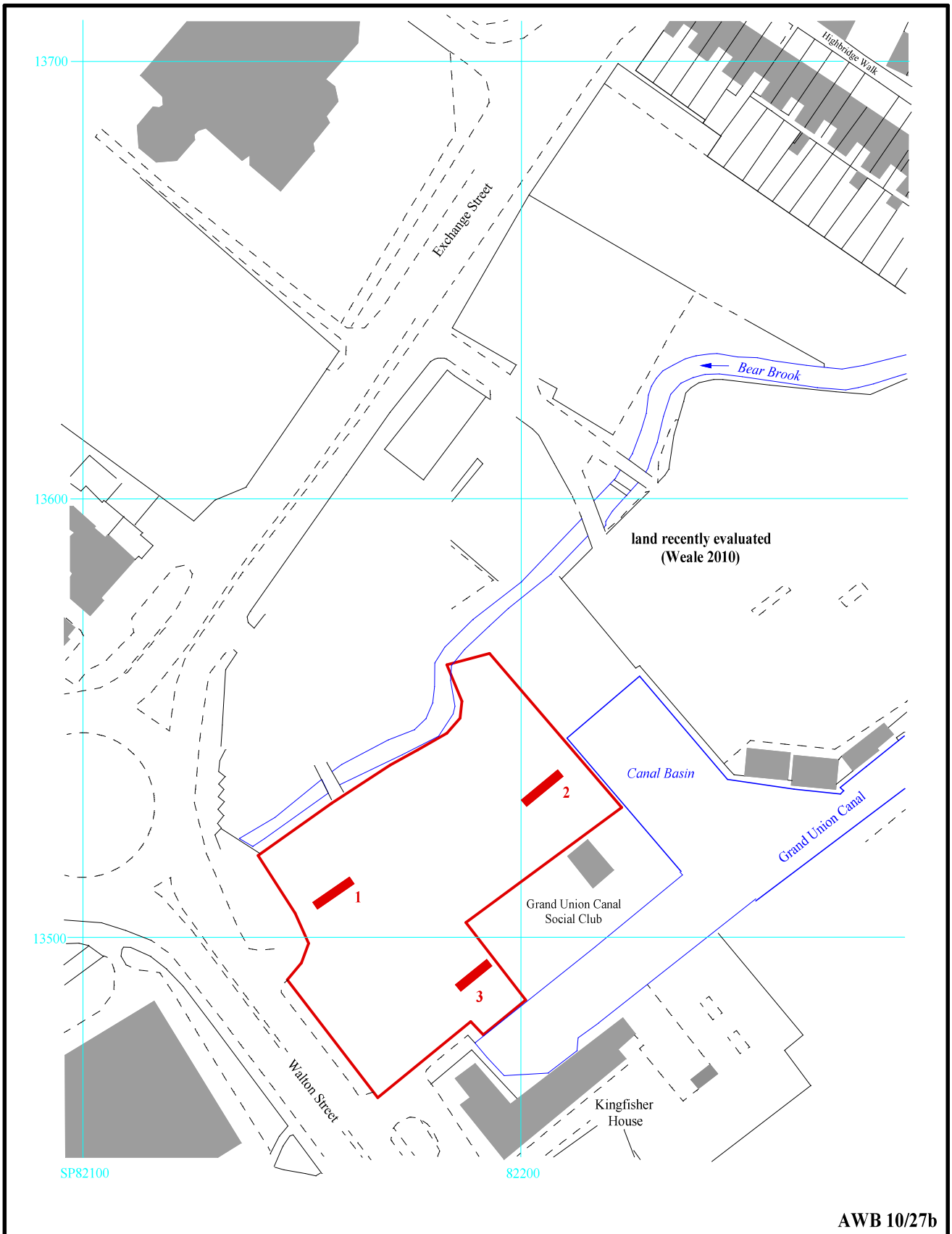


**NEA Site, Aylesbury Waterside,
Walton Street, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, 2011
Archaeological Evaluation**

Figure 1. Location of site within Aylesbury and Buckinghamshire.

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Figure 2. Location of trenches.



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Figure 3. Representative section (Trench 1)





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Figure 4. Representative section (Trench 2).



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Plate 1. Trench 1, looking north east, Scales: 2m



Plate 2. Trench 2, looking north east, Scales: 2m

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NEA Site, Aylesbury Waterside, Walton Street,
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Plates 1 and 2.

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Plate 3. Trench 3, looking east north east, Scales: 2m

AWB 10/27b

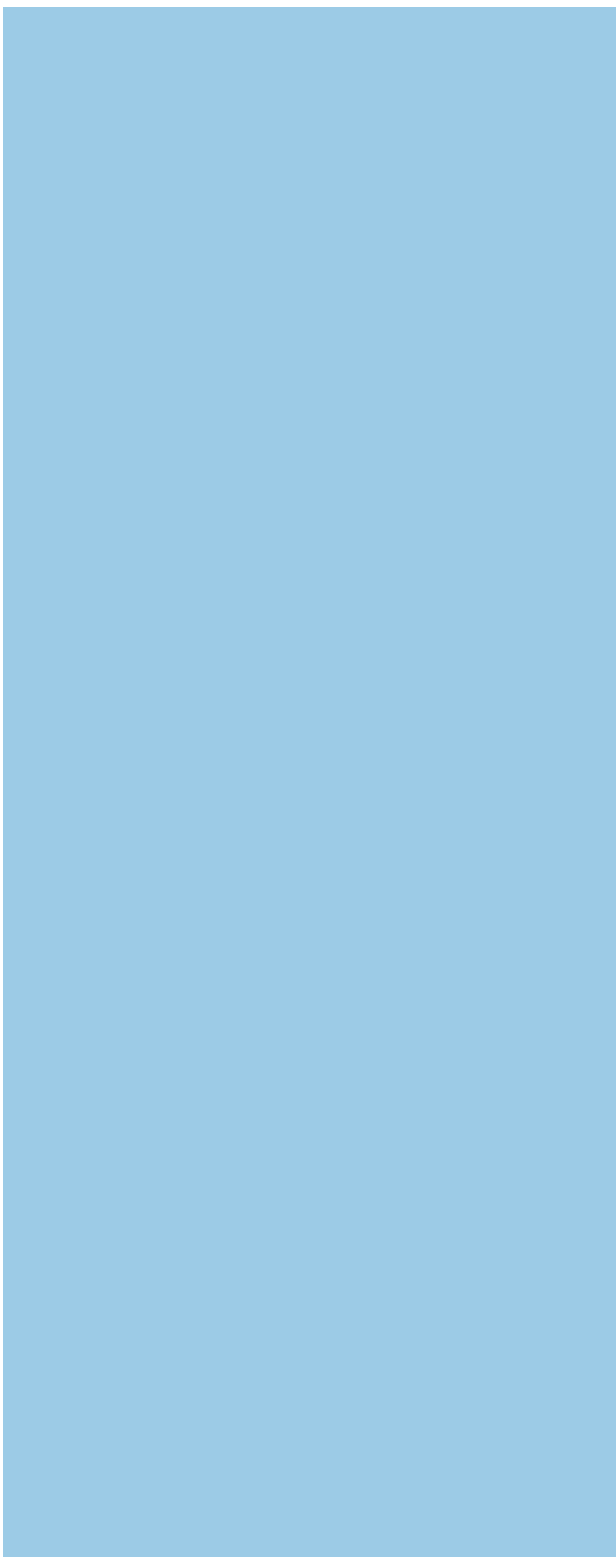
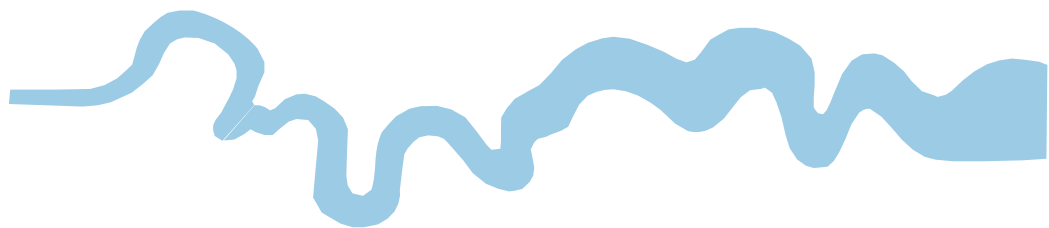
NEA Site, Aylesbury Waterside, Walton Street,
Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, 2011
Archaeological Evaluation
Plate 3

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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
Iron Age _____	BC/AD 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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