

T H A M E S V A L L E Y
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
S E R V I C E S

**Christ Church, Northcourt Road,
Abingdon, Oxfordshire**

Archaeological Evaluation

by James Lewis

Site Code: CCA11/48

(SU 5015 9834)

**Christ Church, Northcourt Road,
Abingdon, Oxfordshire**

**An Archaeological Evaluation
for Christ Church, Abingdon**

by James Lewis
Thames Valley Archaeological Services
Ltd

Site Code CCA 11/48

July 2011

Summary

Site name: Christ Church, Northcourt Road, Abingdon, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SU 5015 9834

Site activity: Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 5th – 7th July

Project manager: James Lewis

Site supervisor: James Lewis

Site code: CCA 11/48

Area of site: 0.35 ha

Summary of results: Seven inter-cutting ditches were found certainly or probably of medieval date, along with a residual prehistoric struck flint and Roman pottery.

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

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Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford ✓ 19.07.11
	Steve Preston ✓ 19.07.11

Christ Church, Northcourt Road, Abingdon, Oxfordshire

An Archaeological Evaluation

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Report 11/48

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at Christ Church, Northcourt Road, Abingdon, Oxfordshire (SU 5015 9834) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr S. G. Hart, of Allen Associates Architects Ltd, The Studio, Tytherton, Bracknell, Berkshire, RG12 1EH, on behalf of Christ Church, Northcourt Road, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, OX4 1PL.

Renewed planning permission (ABG/4080/4) has been gained from Vale of White Horse District Council to redevelop and refurbish the site with the demolition of a small office complex, the building of a new church and the conversion of four barns to other uses. Due the location of the site in an area of archaeological potential (Coddington 2011) the consent is subject to a condition (4) requiring an archaeological evaluation as the first stage of a phased programme of archaeological investigation. This will establish the extent of archaeological deposits in the area and form the basis for any further mitigation measures that might be required.

This is in accordance with *Planning for the Historic Environment* (PPS5 2010) and Policy HE 18 of the Vale of the White Horse District local plan. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Hugh Coddington, Deputy County Archaeologist of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services, advisers to the District on archaeological matters. The fieldwork was undertaken by James Lewis and Aiji Castle from the 5th to the 7th of July and the site code is CCA 11/48. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museums Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located to the north of the centre of Abingdon, just to the west of the A4183 (Fig. 1). The north boundary of the site is delimited by Northcourt Road beyond which is residential housing. The south and east of the site is boarded by the Abingdon Football Club playing field. Beyond the western edge of the site is more residential housing (Fig. 2). The underlying geology is mapped as Second Terrace Gravels (BGS 1971) and the site lies at an elevation of 59m above Ordnance Datum.

Archaeological background

The site is located on the site of Northcourt Grange which was part of the property of Abingdon Abbey. The Abbey, which dates from the 7th century, became one of the major religious houses in medieval times prior to its dissolution in 1552 (Munby *et al.* 1975). The current church was originally a tithe barn and dates probably to the earlier medieval period. The four barns are of later medieval date and it is anticipated that other domestic buildings and possibly a chapel were originally also present on the site. Large pieces of masonry have been found to the west of the tithe barn suggesting the presence of other structures. In the 20th century the site was the location for a dairy and in 1961 the tithe barn was converted into an Anglican Church.

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.

The specific aims were:

- to determine if any archaeologically relevant levels have survived on the site;
- to determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present;
- to determine if any medieval occupation deposits are present on the site; and
- to determine if any deposits relating to a medieval chapel are present on the site.

Two trenches 25m long and 1.6m wide were proposed to be excavated using a JCB-type machine fitted with a toothless bucket. This was to be used to excavate down to the natural geology or until archaeological deposits are encountered, under the constant supervision of an archaeologist. Sufficient of the archaeological deposits were to be sectioned and recorded to achieve the objective 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. Spoilheaps were to be monitored including user of a metal detector.

Results

Three trenches were eventually dug, ranging in length from 5m to 27m and from 0.33–0.7m in depth. Due to the presence of services which restricted the area available to excavate the planned trenches, the third trench was dug to compensate for the loss of length from Trench 1. This was carried out in consultation with Hugh Coddington of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service.

A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1. Appendix 2 presents details of all features recorded.

Trench 1 (Figs 4 and 5; Pls 1 and 2)

Trench 1 was aligned NW–SE and measured 21.5m long and 0.6m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of Tarmac, 0.08m thick which overlay 0.08m of made ground. Below this was 0.24m thick of subsoil which lay above the natural geology. The natural geology in much of the trench had been truncated by modern activity but seven features were revealed at the north-western end. Five of these appeared to be a group of inter-cutting ditches dating to the Medieval period.

Ditch 1 was aligned NNE–SSW and extended beyond the northern and southern sides of the trench. It measured at least 1.4m wide and 0.76m deep and it contained three fills (52, 53 and 54). The base fill (54) consisted of loose brown/red sandy clay with occasional small stone inclusions. Above this was loose red/brown sandy clay (53) and finally above this was loose, brown/red sandy clay (52 same as 67) with occasional small stones inclusions. The ditch was cut into natural gravels and also truncated ditch 5 (see below) and in turn was recut and then truncated on its western side by Ditch 2. The re-cut (7) of ditch 1 was 1.6m wide and 0.24m deep. The ditch contained dark brown/grey sandy clay (66 same as 65) and contained with bone and a single sherd of medieval pottery.

Ditch 2 was aligned on the same direction and measured 1.3m wide and 0.55m deep with three fills, (55, 56 and 64). The base fill (56) consisted of friable brown/orange sandy gravel. Above this was friable brown/red sandy clay (55) and finally overlying this was friable brown sandy clay 64. No dating evidence was recovered from ditches 1 or 2. Both ditches truncated an earlier ditch (5, see below). On its western side Ditch 2 was truncated by ditch 3.

Ditch 3 was on the same alignment as 1 and 2 and measured 1.6m wide and 0.6m deep. It contained three fills; the base fill (58) comprised of friable brown/yellow gravel. Above this was loose brown/green sandy clay (57), with five sherds of medieval pottery and one sherd of Roman pottery and animal bone present. The top fill (63) consisted of friable, yellow/brown sandy clay. This ditch was also truncated on its western side by ditch 4.

Ditch 4 was aligned N-S and was the latest in the sequence. It measured 1.32m wide and 0.6m deep and contained two fills; the base fill was friable dark brown sandy gravel (60). Above the base fill was friable brown/green sandy clay (59), 0.5m thick with 2 sherds of medieval pottery and animal bone. The feature was truncated by a modern post or beam slot.

A large west–east aligned ditch terminal (5) which extended beyond the SE end of the trench, was excavated and it measured 0.7m wide and 1m deep. It contained a single fill of loose brown/green sandy clay

(61) with no finds. The terminal was truncated by ditches 1 and 2 and appears to be the earliest ditch in this sequence.

At the NW end of the trench was a probable gully (6) which was partially excavated as it extended beyond the southern and western sides of the trench. It measured at least 0.38m wide and 0.32m deep. The ditch contained a single fill (62) friable brown/grey sandy with two sherds of medieval pottery, animal bone and a piece of iron slag.

Trench 2 (Fig. 3)

Trench 2 was aligned SW-NE and measured 27m long, 0.66m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of Tarmac, 0.09m thick which overlay 0.46m thick of made ground above the natural geology of sand. No archaeological deposits were found in this trench with all finds and features dated to the 20th century. The area where this trench was located appears to have been heavily truncated probably during the construction of the dairy.

Trench 3 (Fig. 3)

Trench three was aligned west-east and measured 5m long and 0.33m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of Tarmac 0.1m thick which directly overlay the natural geology. No archaeological deposits were found. The stratigraphy suggests that the trench had been truncated, presumably during construction of the 20th-century dairy.

Finds

Pottery by Jane Timby

The evaluation resulted in the recovery of 11 sherds of pottery weighing 79.5g dating to the Roman and medieval periods (Appendix 3). Pottery was recovered from just four contexts ranging from single pieces to a maximum of six fragments from ditch (3). The sherds were quite well preserved in terms of surfaces and edge abrasion but moderately well broken-up with an overall average sherd weight of 7.2g. There are no rims present. For the purposes of the assessment the assemblage was sorted macroscopically into fabrics in order to ascertain date and quantified by sherd count and weight.

Roman

A single sherd of Central Gaulish samian was recovered from ditch 3 (fill 57). The sherd is from a bowl (Dr. 36) with barbotine decoration on the rim and was made in the 2nd century. As it was found with later sherds it is a redeposited piece.

Medieval

The remaining 10 sherds are all from unglazed medieval jars / cooking pots. The sherds are all body or base sherds. One piece from ditch recut 7 (fill 66) is heavily sooted on the exterior from use. The fabrics mainly contain sand and limestone and in some cases flint and all likely to be locally made products. The sherds equate to Mellor (1994) fabrics OXAC, OXBF and OXAG which were largely in use from the 11th to 13th centuries.

Animal Bone by Ceri Falys

A small assemblage of animal bone was recovered from four separate contexts within the evaluated area. All contexts were ditches or gullies. A total of 11 fragments of bone were present for analysis, weighing 369g. They are detailed in Appendix 4. The overall preservation of the remains was poor, with all pieces fragmented and displaying frequent cortical bone surface damage.

Initial analyses roughly sorted elements into categories based on size, not by species. The three categories are: “large”, “medium”, and “small”. Horse and cow are represented by the large size category, sheep/goat and pigs are represented in the medium size category, and any smaller animal (e.g. dog, cat etc.) were designated to the “small” category. Wherever possible, a more specific identification to species and side of origin was made. The minimum number of individuals both within and between the species was determined.

The minimum number of animals present in this assemblage was three, two large and one medium sized individual. The “large size” animals were identified as a horse and a cow individual. The horse was represented by a proximal portion of a horse intermediate phalanx in ditch 3 (57), while a left cow tarsal was present in gully 6 (62). The medium-sized animal was not identifiable to species, due to a non-descript long bone shaft fragment, but it likely originated from a sheep/goat.

Multiple cut mark were present on an unidentifiable large animal vertebral fragment (59), and the cow tarsal (62), suggestive of butchery practices. No further information could be retrieved.

Iron slag

A single lump of iron slag (100g) was recovered from ditch 6 (fill 62).

Struck flint by Steve Ford

A single residual struck flint was recovered from ditch 3 (57). It is a broken flake. It is not closely datable and only a broad Neolithic or Bronze Age date can be suggested.

Conclusion

The evaluation has revealed the presence of archaeology on the site despite the evidence for extensive areas of truncation of the archaeologically relevant horizon in relatively modern times. The evaluation has uncovered six intercutting ditches and a gully located at the north-west end of trench 3. The later features are of medieval or later date from at least the 11th to 13th centuries. The earlier features produced no direct dating evidence but are likely also to be of medieval date.

A single flint flake and a sherd of Roman pottery point to a low level of prehistoric and Roman activity in the area, not necessarily reflecting any more than casual loss/discard, or manuring of farmland.

References

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- Coddington, H, 2011, 'Christ Church, Northcourt Road, Abingdon; Design Brief for Archaeological Field Evaluation', Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service, Oxford
- Mellor, M, 1994, 'Oxfordshire Pottery: A Synthesis of middle and late Saxon, medieval and early post-medieval pottery in the Oxford Region', *Oxoniensia*, **59**, 17–217
- Munby, J, Rodwell, K and Turner H, 1975, 'Abingdon,' in K Rodwell (ed), *Historic Towns in Oxfordshire: a survey of the new County*, Oxford Archaeol Unit Survey No 3, Oxford, 33–40
- PPS5, 2010, *Planning for the Historic Environment*, Planning Policy Statement 5, The Stationery Office, Norwich

APPENDIX 1: Trench details
0m at SW end

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	21.5	1.6	0.70	0–0.08m Tarmac; 0.08-0.16m made ground; 0.16-0.4m subsoil; 0.4m+ sand natural geology. Features 1-7. [Plates 1 and 2]
2	27.0	1.6	0.66	0–0.10m Tarmac; 0.10m + sand natural geology.
3	5.0	1.6	0.33	0–0.09m Tarmac; 0.09-0.55m made ground; 0.55m+ sand natural geology.

APPENDIX 2: Feature details

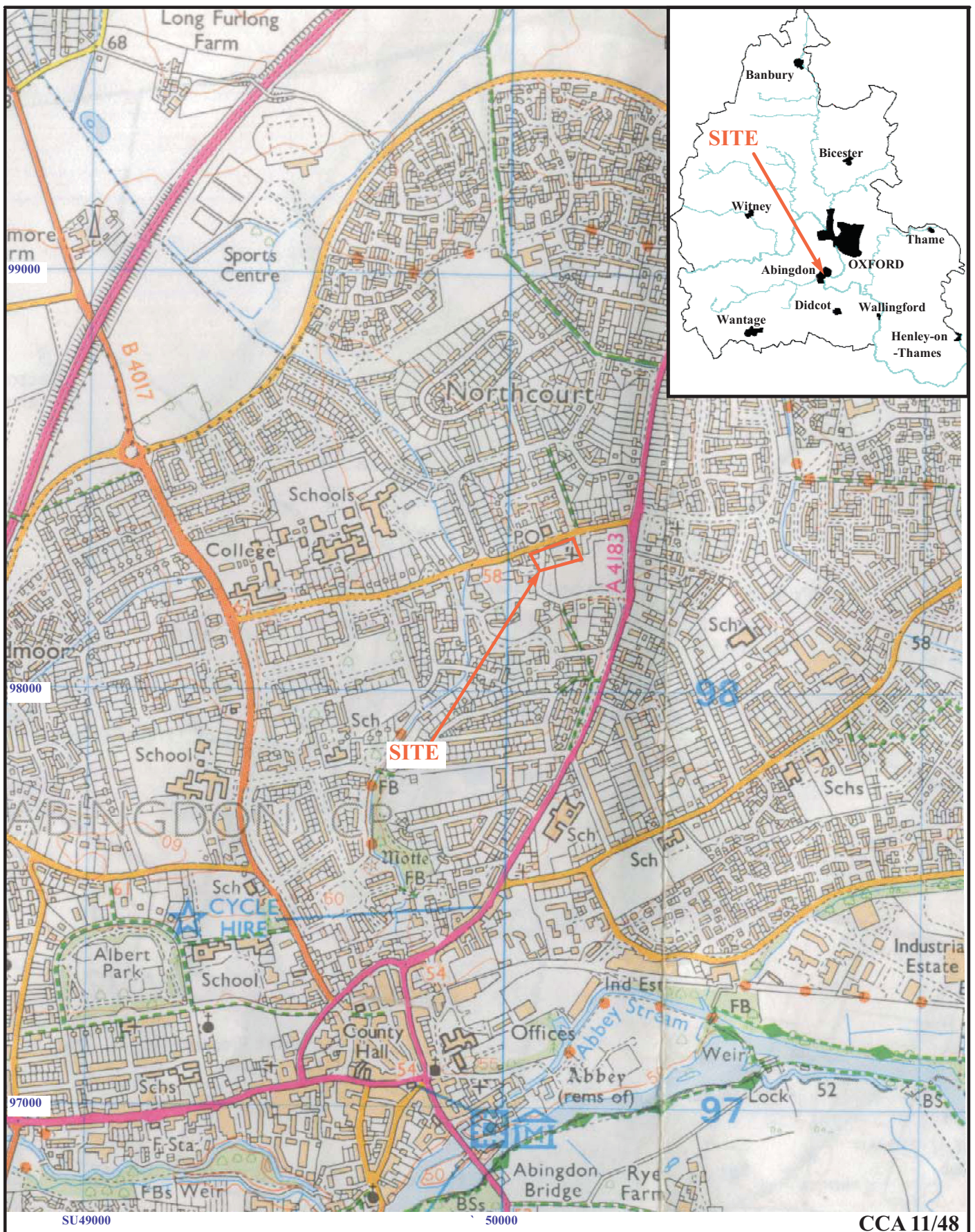
<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
1	1	52, 53, 54, 67	Ditch	Medieval or earlier	Stratigraphic
1	2	55, 56, 64	Ditch	Medieval	Stratigraphic
1	3	57, 58, 63	Ditch	Medieval	Pottery
1	4	59, 60	Ditch	Medieval	Pottery
1	5	61	Ditch	Medieval or earlier	Stratigraphic
1	6	62	Gully	Medieval	Pottery
1	7	65= 66	Ditch (re-cut of 1)	Medieval	Pottery

APPENDIX 3: Pottery catalogue

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>Roman</i>	<i>Medieval</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Weight (g)</i>
3	57	1	5	6	26
4	59	-	2	2	16
6	62	-	2	2	6.5
7	66	-	1	1	31
TOTAL		1	10	11	79.5

APPENDIX 4: Inventory of animal bone

Context		Number of Fragments	Weight (g)	Identified – by size category			Unidentified
Cut	Deposit			Large	Medium	Small	
3	57	6	122	4 (horse)	2	-	-
4	59	1	26	1	-	-	-
6	62	1	54	1 (cow)	-	-	-
7	65	3	167	1	1	-	1
Totals / MNI		11	369	1 horse, 1 cow	1 unidentifiable animal	-	-

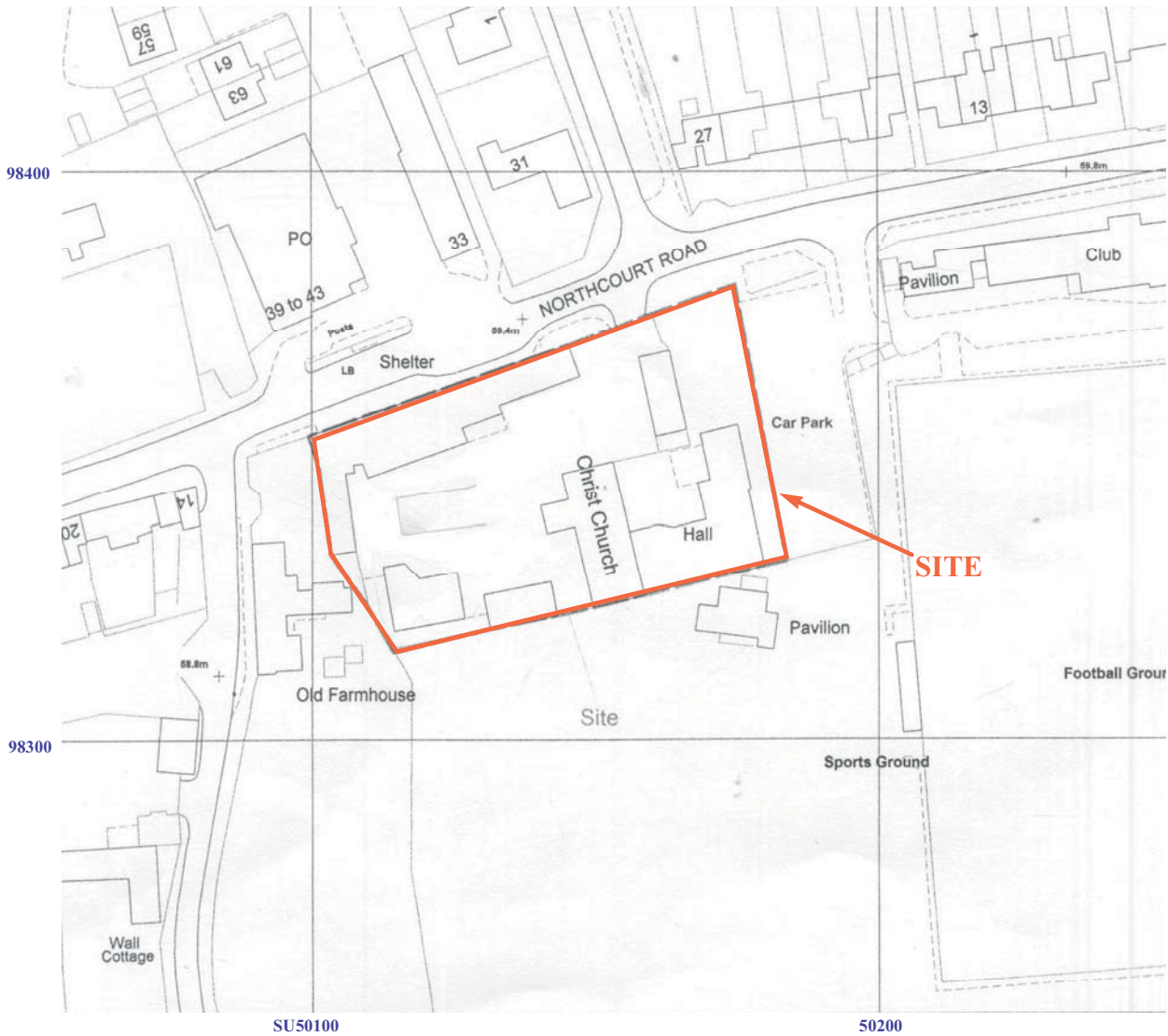


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Figure 1. Location of site within Abingdon and Oxfordshire.

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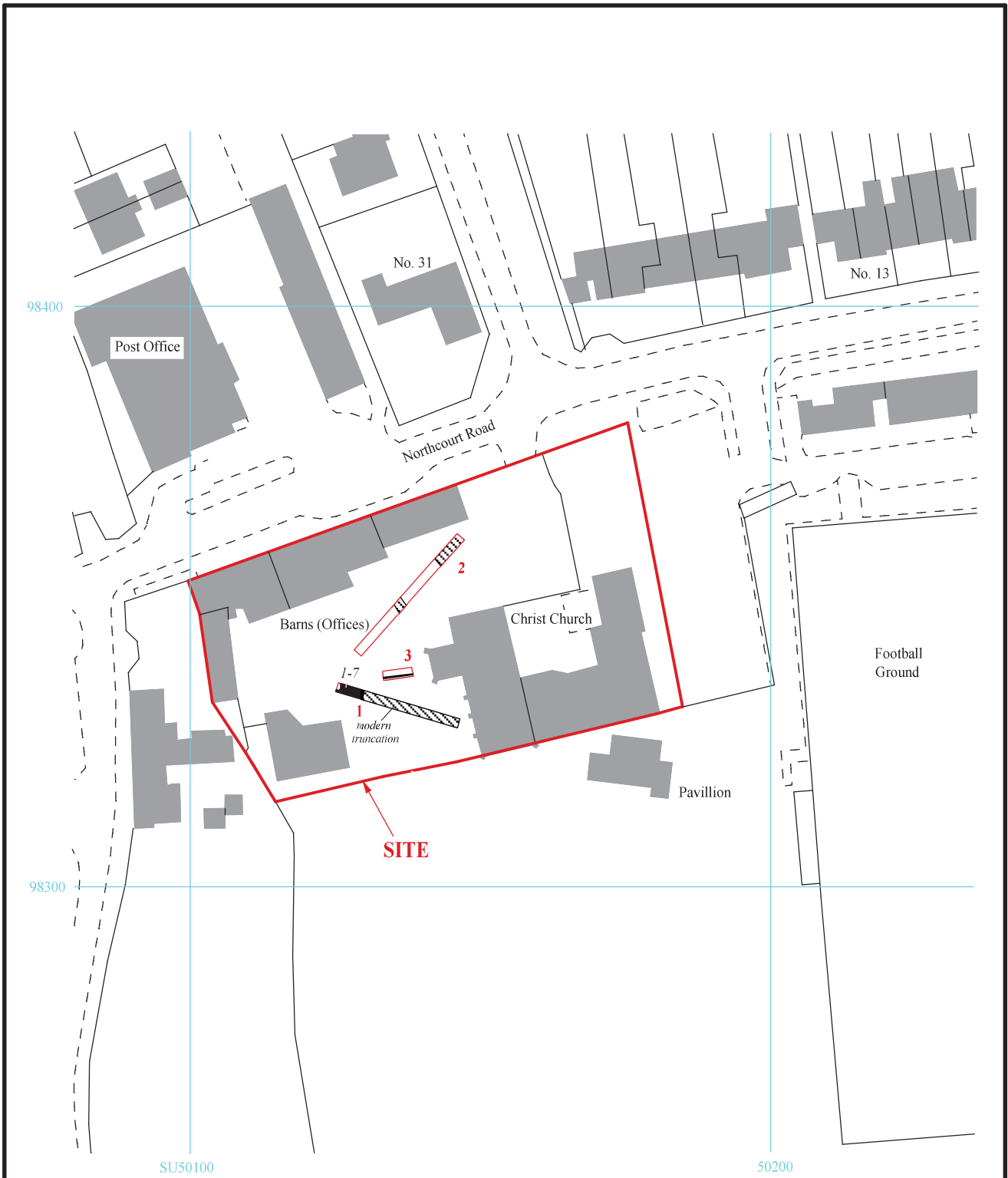


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Figure 2. Detailed location of site off Northcourt Road.

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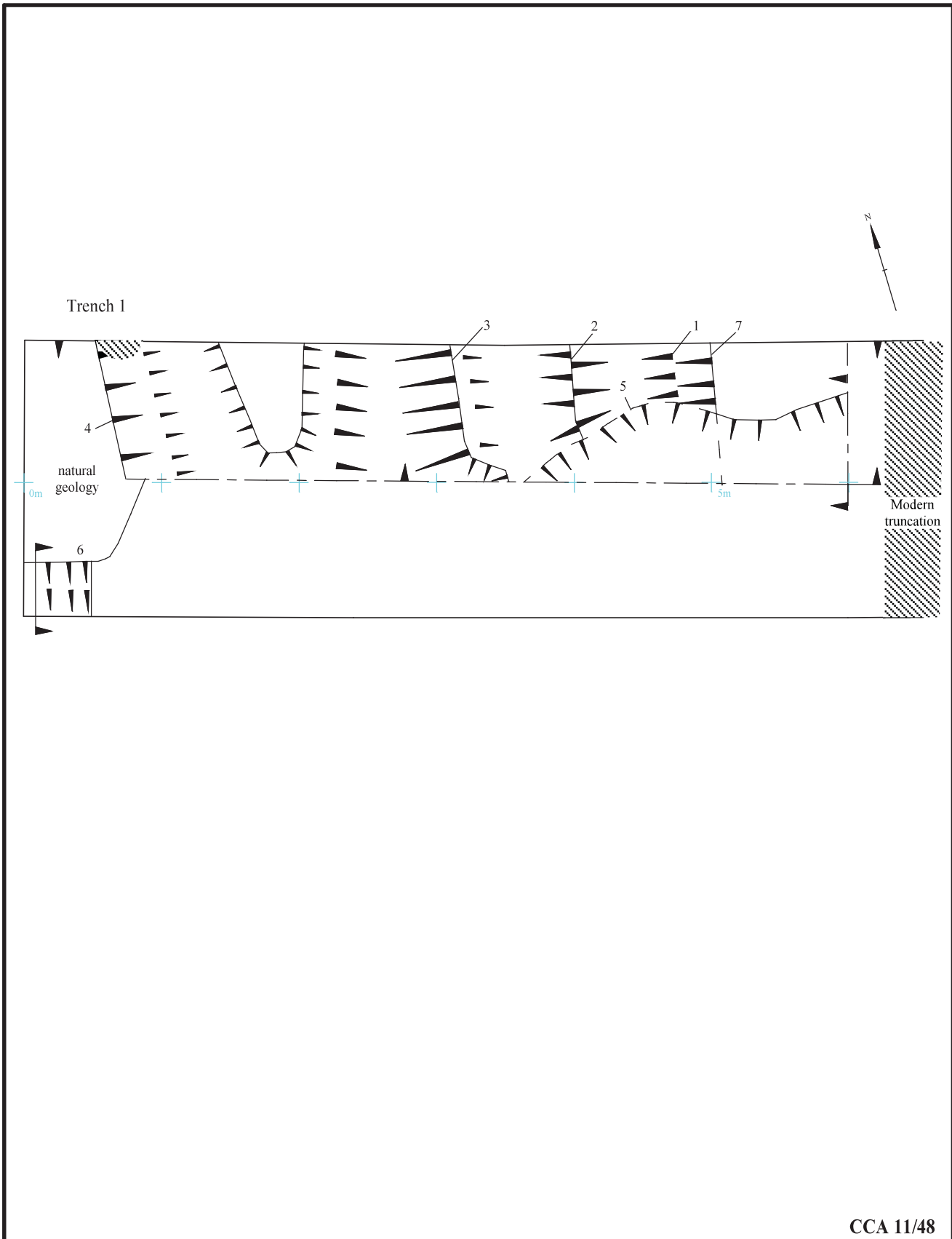


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Figure 3. Location of trenches.



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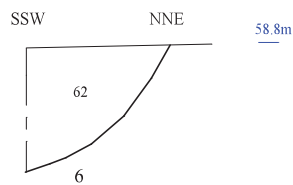
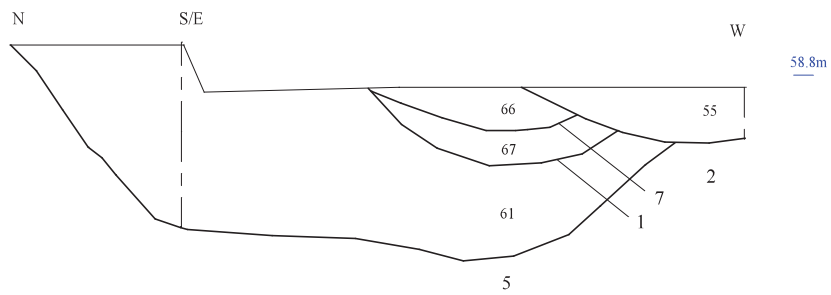
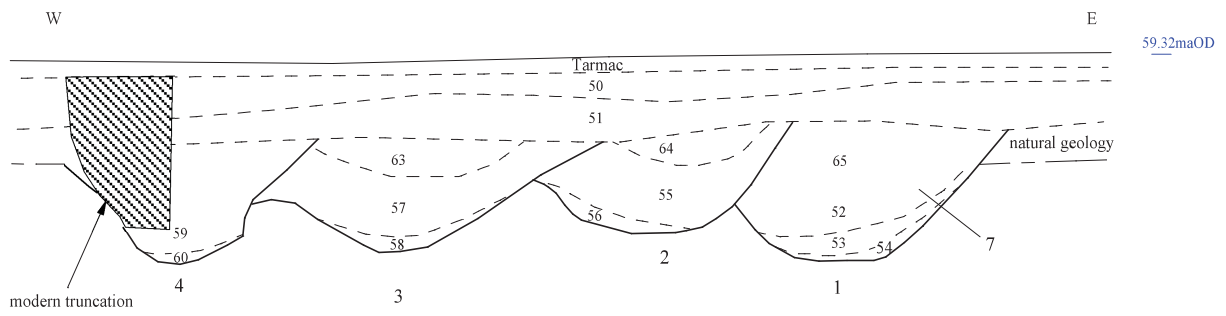


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Figure 4. Detail of Trench 1





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Figure 5. Sections





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



Plate 2. Trench 1, features 4, 3, 2 and 1 (recut 7), looking north east, Scales: 2m and 1m.

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Archaeological Evaluation**

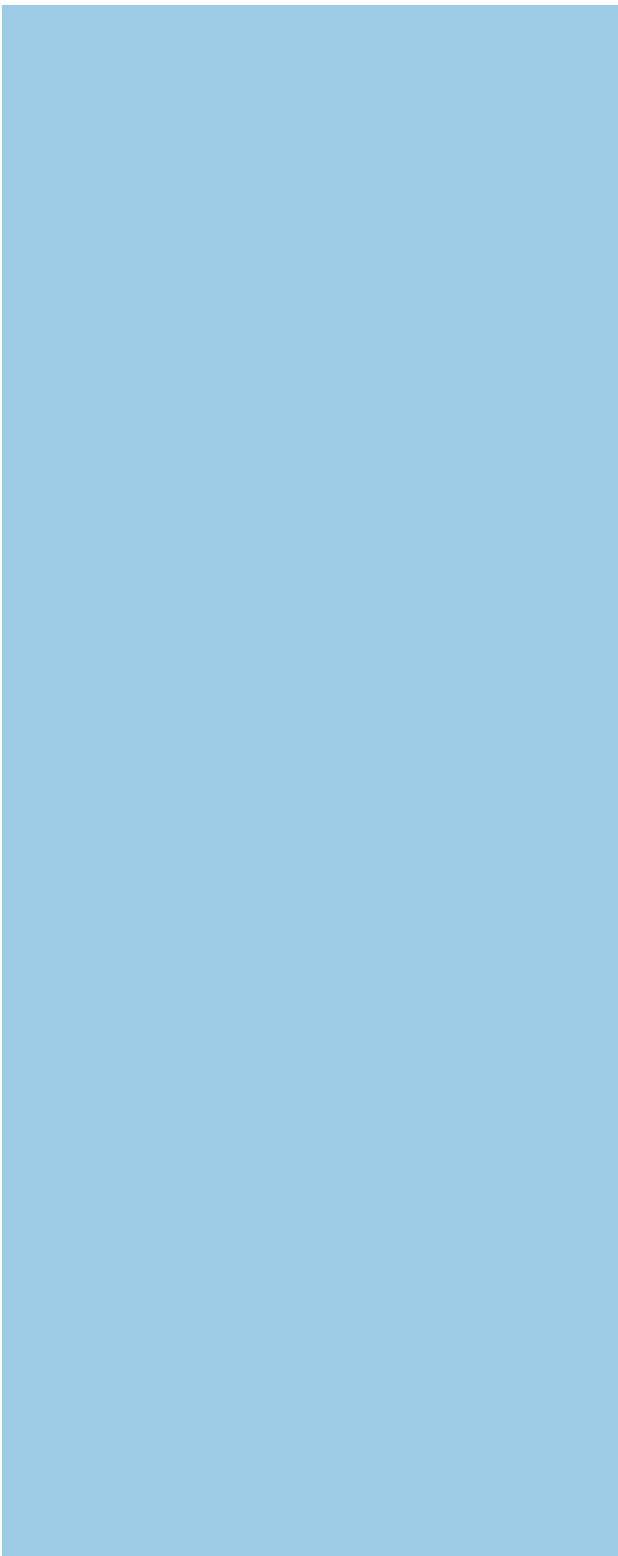
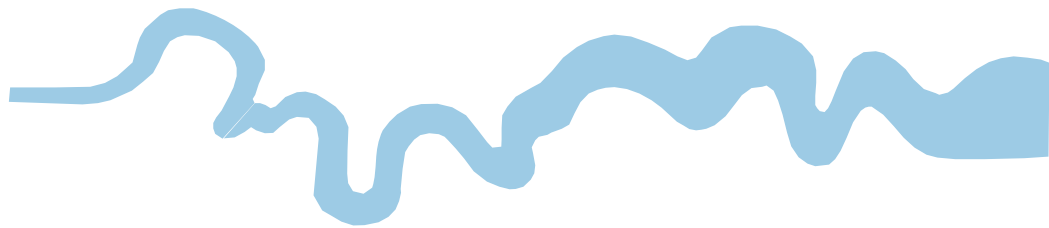
Plates 1 and 2.

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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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