

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**Land off Stag Lane, Berkhamsted,
Hertfordshire**

Archaeological Watching Brief

by Andy Muddin

Site Code: SLB08/70

(SP 9838 0837)

Land off Stag Lane, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For CgMs Consulting

by AndrewMundin
ThamesValleyArchaeologicalServices
Ltd

SiteCodeSLB08/70

June 2010

Summary

Site name: Land off Stag Lane, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire

Grid reference: SP 9838 0837

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 6th June – 10th December 2008

Project manager: Jennifer Lowe

Site supervisor: Andrew Mundin

Site code: SLB 08/70

Area of site: Full development site - 3.22ha; culverting observed - c. 110m²

Summary of results: Two stages of excavation were observed during this watching brief. The first stage observed excavation of deposits around a previous piled position for the western roadbridge of Sheldon Way. The second stage monitored excavation to the west of this bridge and the western extent of the deculverting. Though 19th- and 20th-century deposits were mostly encountered, a small, thin area of truncated peat and an alluvial deposit was reached in the bridge support excavation. No archaeologically relevant finds were recovered during these works.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Dacorum Heritage Trust in due course, with the accession code HSLB07.

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford ✓ 02.06.10 Steve Preston ✓ 01.06.10

Land off Stag Lane, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire An Archaeological Watching Brief

by Andrew Muddin

Report 08/70

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at land off Stag Lane, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, (SP 9838 0837) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Ms Lorraine Mayo (*nee* Darton) of CgMs Consulting, Morley House, 26 Holborn Viaduct, London, EC1A 2AT, on behalf of Bellway Homes Ltd.

Planning permission has been granted by Dacorum Borough Council (4/02672/05/FUL) for a major development, of which this report only encompasses the deculverting that occurred across the central part of the development area. Previous works have investigated the site as a whole, in the form of deposit modelling (Darton 2007a) and desk-based assessment (AOC 2005). Small scale site investigation has occurred with a geoarchaeological borehole survey (Green 2007) and an archaeological watching brief, investigating parts of the site with trial test pits and observation of sections of a sewer pipe within the new road access (Sheldon Way and Nash Close) (PCA 2008). The outcome of these works has identified, although heavily truncated by 19th and 20th century features, archaeology of Roman and Medieval date, and palaeoenvironmental evidence of a late Mesolithic/Early Neolithic stream course, surviving on the site.

This project was undertaken in line with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG 16), and according to a specification (Darton 2007b) approved by the Archaeological Adviser for Hertfordshire County Council, on behalf of the Borough Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by Andrew Muddin in stages between the 6th June and 10th December 2008. The TVAS project code is SLB 08/70; the archive will be deposited with the Dacorum Heritage Trust with accession code HSLB07.

Location, topography and geology

The site is situated within the central northern part of Berkhamsted town centre. It is also located in the Bulbourne river valley, which contains the route of the Grand Union Canal, which has utilized the original course of the River Bulbourne. This new housing development's northern boundary is formed by the canal, and on its eastern side is Stag Lane. The High Street is to the south with housing and shops bounding the site to the south (Fig. 1).

Prior to the redevelopment the site contained industrial units. From the geotechnical information that has been gathered for the site, it has been noted that the original valley side existed on site, sloping from the south with a fall to the north. This was shown on the 1612 map of Berkhamsted, which also showed a mill leat forming a right angle to the natural channel in the central eastern part of the site (Darton 2007a).

The geotechnical investigation showed a sequence of made ground overlying Valley Gravel on the site, with this overlying Middle Chalk. This is also how the area is depicted on the geological map (BGS 1946), though there was a distinct lack of alluvial deposits within the borehole survey, suggesting truncation, evident by the presence of made ground, overlying natural gravel. The previous works showed (PCA 2008) that upper natural deposits on the site are at c.110m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) in the south to 104m in the north.

Archaeological background

Previous reporting has covered the general historical background for Berkhamsted and the effect of the Grand Union canal being built on the natural river course (AOC 2005; Darton 2007a; PCA 2008). In summary, evidence has been found in Berkhamsted for prehistoric and Roman activity, mostly in the form of habitation associated with iron working, within the Bulbourne Valley. On this site in particular, archaeological works have already occurred in the form of a borehole survey and trial test pitting/watching brief. A single, late Mesolithic/Early Neolithic linear feature was identified during monitoring of a sewer main (Fig. 2; PCA 2008). This has been dated by radiocarbon dating of the humic deposit within the stream channel, giving a date of 4320-4040 cal BC (Beta 237215) for the top of the peat and 5320-5050 cal BC (Beta 237216) for the base. Red deer antler was also recovered from its fill. It is thought that this deposit may survive, albeit likely heavily truncated, through other parts of the site.

The course of the Roman road Akeman Street is projected to follow the modern day A41, and the High Street through Berkhamstead. Roman material had been recovered from this site in the form of a ditch, perpendicular to the modern High Street, which contained a coin of 2nd century date (PCA 2008). Other remains that had been identified on site by previous works (PCA 2008) are Medieval in date, though heavily truncated. A chalk foundation and other sparse remains in the south-east part of the site, represent multi-phased habitation probably fronting the High Street at the rear of burgage plots, with small scale industrial activity behind.

It was therefore thought that the area of works associated with this project (the deculverting) in the northern part of the site, may well encounter the lower sequence of preserved remains, such as the stream channel, depending on the level of 19th- and 20th-century truncation that has occurred to this part of the site.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the deculverting groundworks. As these deep groundworks would need to reach the natural gravel, it was anticipated that surviving archaeologically relevant layers could be destroyed during these works. It was therefore important to identify the stratigraphic sequence of the deposits in this part of the site. These works were to be dug systematically in spits with a 360° mechanical excavator under archaeological supervision, fitted with a grading bucket.

If any archaeologically significant deposits were encountered, hand cleaning of the deposits would try to establish date, character and evidence/potential of its date. All areas of the investigation, including previous areas of archaeological investigation are shown on Figure 2.

Results

Two phases of groundworks were observed: the bridge support area and the western deculverting area. These were targeted due to the potential for finding the projected line of the stream course.

Bridge support area (Pls 1-3; Fig. 3)

This area had already been drill piled in the areas where the side supports would be built (Fig. 3). Initially, ground was excavated around the piles on the southern side of this area, which covered *c.* 4m x 13m. Stratigraphically upper deposits (layers 50, 51 and 52) were modern in date. Modern ceramic building material and porcelain were noted top three layers of the sequence, which extended to a depth of between 0.9–1.5m. A gas main also entered the section on the south-western side. Beneath was a dark brown (possibly contaminated) made ground (53) that was up to 0.7m thick. This also contained occasional late post-medieval/modern material such as porcelain. The excavation here was 1.9m deep.

At a depth of 107.2m above OD a thin humic deposit (54) was noted in the southern section only, 0.11m thick. This seemed to overlie grey clay (55) and was 0.2m thick, which in turn overlay gravel at the base of the section. A linear disturbance cut the gravel here running east to west, representing a deep disused service pipe.

Further extension of this area strip then occurred to the northern section. This eventually linked up to the piled area in the north, which was dug to the same depth as to the south and to the same dimensions. No humic

layers or clay layers were uncovered in this part of the excavation. Modern deposits had truncated the ground to gravel to a depth of 1.85m below ground level (GL).

Western culvert area (Pls 4–5; Fig. 2)

This area was observed several months after the construction of the bridge. Here, the excavation observed the removal of deposits from the western side of the bridge support, heading westwards across the site. No clear stratigraphic sequence could be noted here as the ground to at least a depth of 1.6m seemed to be a mix of rubble material. The piling mat had raised the ground level here by 0.25m. The level of excavation did not uncover humic deposits, and it would seem that surface disturbance could have greatly effected the preservation of underlying deposits here. No further deculverting was seen as it was noted that the level of truncation from previous site use had deeply disturbed deposits down to the depth of the natural geology.

Finds

No finds were recovered from the humic layer or the alluvium. Other finds of 19th and 20th century date from made ground layers were retained on site.

Conclusion

Though archaeological deposits had been noted previously on this site, it was noted that too much subsurface disturbance had occurred on the parts of the site reported in this phase of works, to allow the survival of Roman or Medieval remains further than what had already been identified.

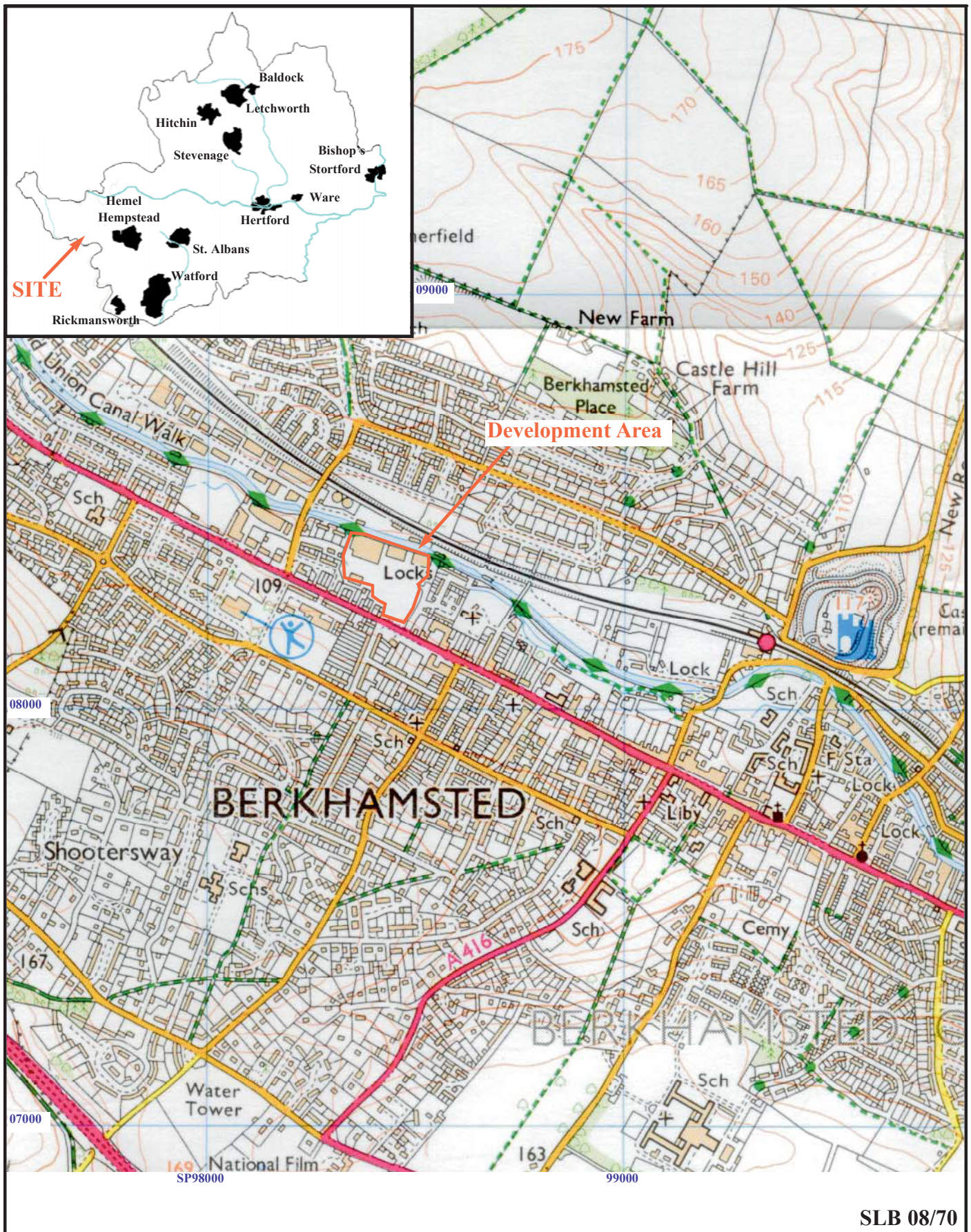
The stream course seems to survive intermittently across the site although it was noted here that it has been severely truncated at the point it was identified. It has been recognized that the course crosses the site from the north-west to south-east, probably flowing down the valley edge to the river course to the north.

References

- AOC, 2005, 'An Archaeological Desk-based assessment of Stag Lane, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire', AOC Archaeology unpubl rep, Twickenham
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- Green, C, 2007, 'Stag Lane, Berkhamsted: Geoarchaeological Field Investigation – Preliminary Report', ArchaeoScape unpubl rep, Egham
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APPENDIX 1: HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RECORD SUMMARY SHEET

Site name and address: Land off Stag Lane, Berkhamsted		
County: Hertfordshire	District: Dacorum BC	
Village/Town: Sawbridgeworth	Parish: Berkhamsted	
Planning application reference:		
Client name and address.: CgMs Consulting, Morley House, 26 Holborn Viaduct, London, EC1A 2AT		
Nature of application: Construction of new housing estate to the west of Stag Lane, with new access road and culvert of the River Bulbourne.		
Present land use: Currently under development from previous industrial use		
Size of application area: 3.22ha	Size of area investigated: c.110m ²	
NGR (to 8 figures): SP 9838 0837		
Site code (if applicable): HSLB 07 (SLB 08/70)		
Site director/Organization: Andy Munding, Thames Valley Archaeological Services		
Type of work: Archaeological watching brief		
Date of work:	Start: 6th June 2008	Finish: 10th December 2008
Location of finds & site archive/Curating museum: Dacorum Heritage Trust		
Related HER Nos:	Periods represented: Modern layers of made ground; humic lense and alluvial deposit, possibly remnant of Mesolithic stream course identified elsewhere on site.	
Relevant previous summaries/reports: Darton, L, 2007a, Archaeological Deposit Modelling Report, Stag Lane, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, CgMs unpublished report Darton, L, 2007b, Specification for Archaeological Monitoring Exercise, Stag Lane, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, CgMs unpublished report Green, C, 2007, Stag Lane, Berkhamsted: Geoarchaeological Field Investigation – Preliminary Report. ArchaeoScape Unpublished Report. PCA, 2008, Stag Lane, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd unpublished report, London		
Summary of fieldwork results: Two stages of excavation were observed during this watching brief. The first area observed excavation of deposits around a previous piled position for the western road bridge of Sheldon Way. The second area monitored excavation to the west of this bridge and the western extent of the deculverting. Though 19th and 20th century deposits were mostly encountered, a small, thin area of truncated peat and an alluvial deposit was reach in the bridge support excavation. No archaeologically relevant finds was obtained during these works.		
Author of summary: Andrew Munding		Date of summary: 26-05-2010



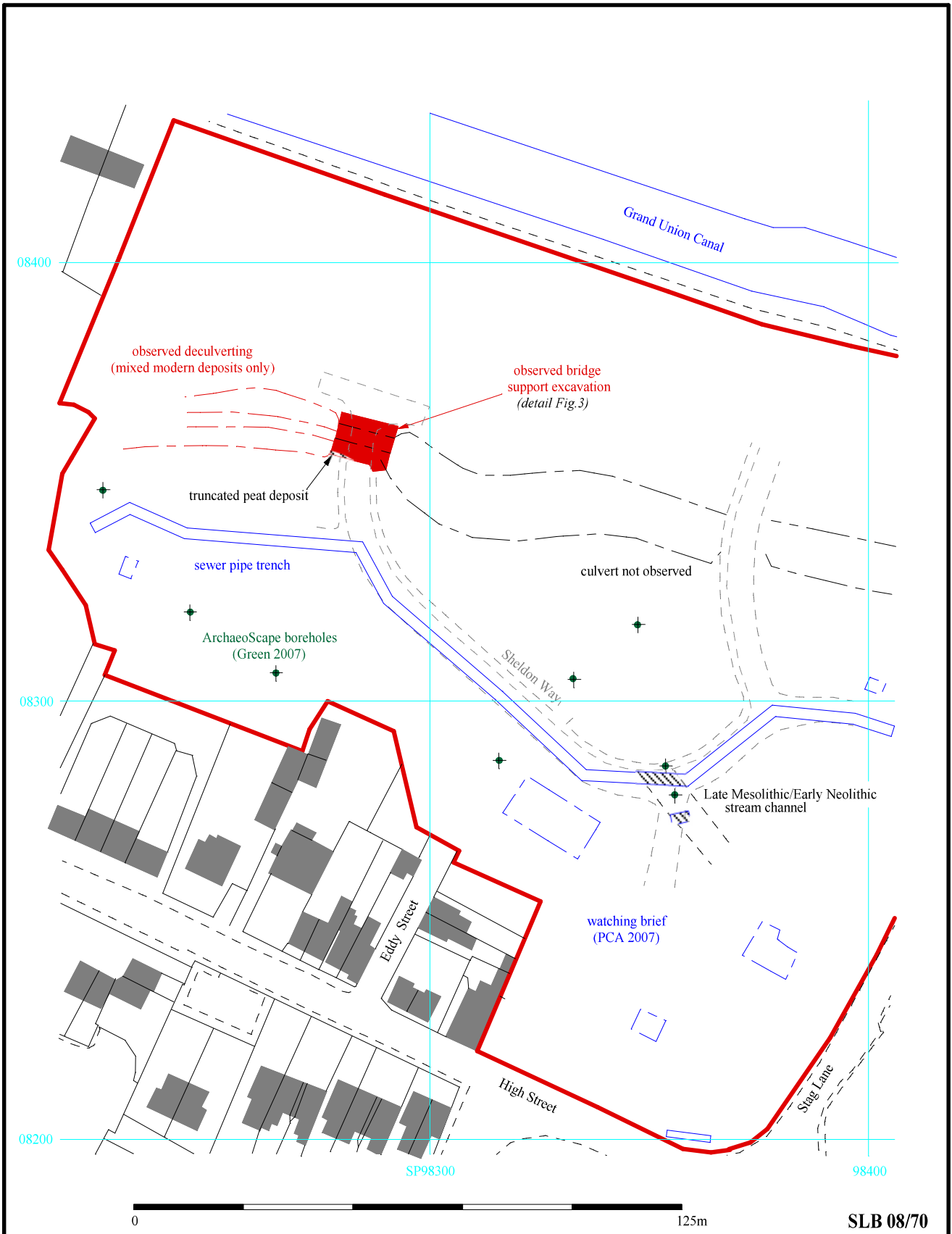
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Figure 1. Location of site within Berkhamstead and Hertfordshire.

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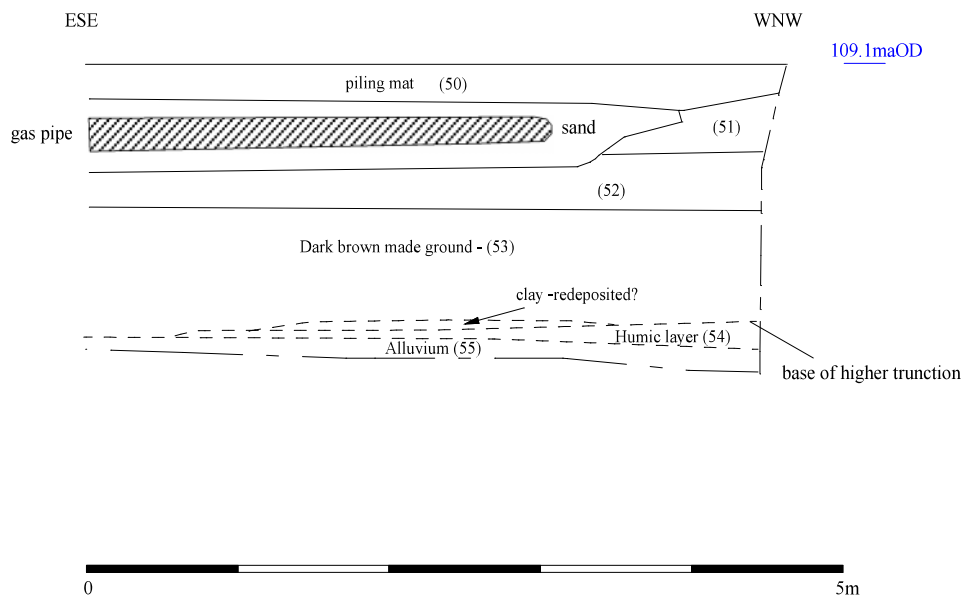
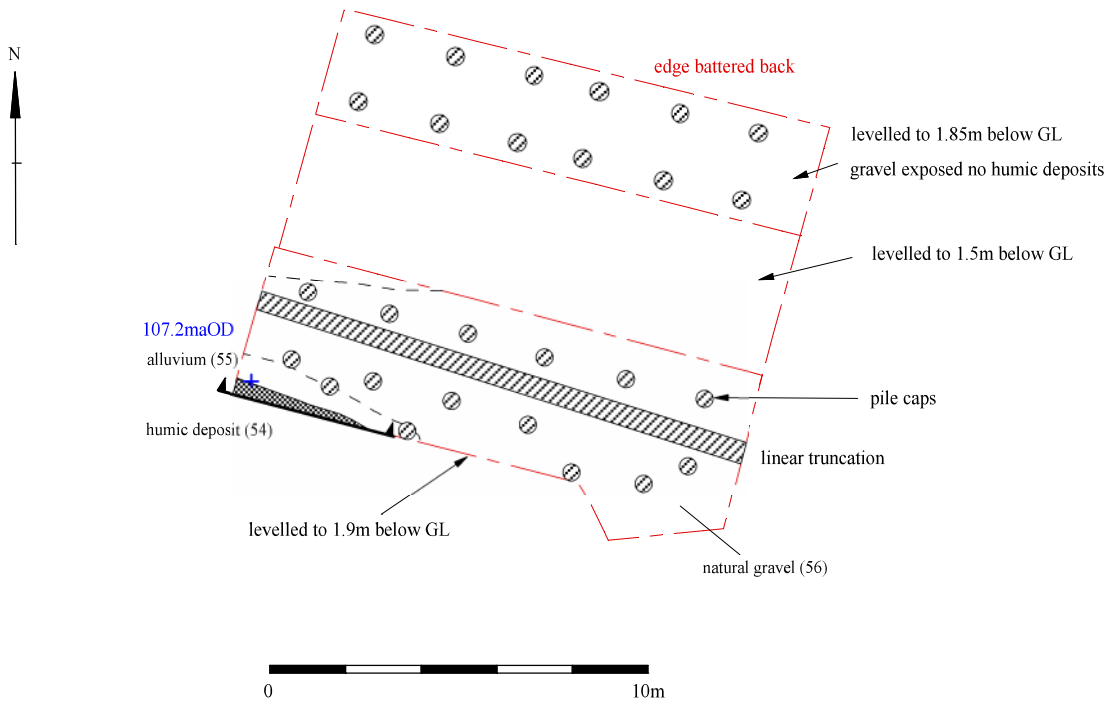


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Figure 2. Detail of development area.





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Figure 3. Bridge support detail and section.



Plate 1. Bridge support area, looking north west, strip in progress uncovering piles in north.



Plate 2. Bridge support area looking north west, with humic layer and alluvium at base of section.



Plate 3. Bridge support area looking east.

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Plates 1-3

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Plate 4. Constructed bridge looking east, with culvert level in foreground.



Plate 5. Culvert section.

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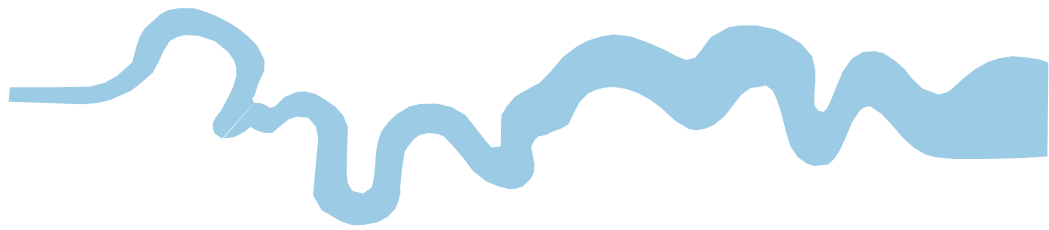
Plates 4 and 5

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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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