

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**Land Adjoining Caversham Rectory,
Church Road, Reading, Berkshire**

An archaeological excavation

By James McNicoll-Norbury

**CRC11/11
(SU 7099 7480)**

Land Adjoining Caversham Rectory, Church Road, Reading, Berkshire

An Archaeological Excavation

For Mr Mike Bond

by James McNicoll-Norbury

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code CRC 11/11

July 2011

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Report 11/11

Summary

A small area of excavation on the site prior to redevelopment revealed a number of features of medieval and later date. These comprised a small group of pits, and linear features one of which was replaced by a flint-built wall which are thought to be boundaries for properties fronting Church Street. The medieval deposits add modestly to our knowledge of the topography of medieval and early post-medieval Caversham. A single struck flint of Mesolithic or earlier Neolithic date and two sherds of Bronze Age pottery were also found.

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological excavation carried out at land adjoining the Rectory, 20 Church Road, Caversham, Reading, Berkshire (SU 7099 7480) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Mike Bond of 11 Ammanford Road, Reading, RG4 7XN.

Planning permission has been sought from Reading Borough Council for the construction of a new house with basement. An earlier permission (app no 06/01472/FUL) had been gained from Reading Borough Council for the construction of a new house, parish meeting room and ground reduction to provide a floodwater compensate zone on this site. The ground reduction for the flood compensation zone was undertaken but the house was not built. A new application for the building of a house with a basement has recently been withdrawn. This scheme is intended to support a resubmission of the latter scheme.

As a consequence of the possibility of archaeological deposits on the site which may be damaged or destroyed by groundworks, field observation has been requested as detailed in *Planning for the Historic Environment* (PPS5, 2010) and the Borough Council policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mrs Mary Neale, Archaeological Officer for Berkshire Archaeology, advisers to the Borough Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by James McNicoll-Norbury and Dan Bray between the 18th and 21st July 2011 and the site code is CRC 11/11.

The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Reading Museum in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on a plot of land adjacent to 20 Church Road, Caversham, which is a Grade II listed building. Caversham lies on the north side of the River Thames at a bridging point across the Thames (Fig. 1). The site comprises a roughly rectangular parcel of land bounded by Church Road to the north, Caversham Rectory to the west, residential buildings with garden to the east and the River Thames to the south (Fig. 2). The site is currently occupied by various overgrowth; it slopes gently from the north down towards the river at the southern end of the site. The site is located on loams, alluvial silts and terrace gravel above Upper Chalk (BGS 1971), at *c.* 40m above Ordnance Datum. A clayey loam was revealed here.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site has been demonstrated by previous fieldwork on the site; an evaluation in 2007 (Weale 2007) and an partial excavation targeted on the previously intended development including the designated flood compensation zone (Milbank 2009). The site's geographical location is also of significance; the site lies in an area where a number of prehistoric finds have been recorded in the Berkshire Historic Environment Record, mainly dredged from the river and from gravel extraction. The site also lies close to St Peter's Church. The parish church is a location usually considered to lie close to the historic (medieval) centre of a settlement and it is possible that deposits of this period or preceding late Saxon times may be encountered. The 12th-century rectory lay nearby at Caversham Court which was controlled by the Augustinian Priory of Notely (near Long Crendon, Buckinghamshire). The subsequent 17th-century rectory also lay at Caversham Court until replaced by the current rectory (a listed building) built in 1823 and the original buildings demolished in the 1930s.

Field evaluation carried out in September 2007 has clarified this potential (Weale 2007). A number of cut features and deposits were recorded, mostly of 19th-century date but with others of earlier but unknown date present. A single sherd of medieval pottery was found.

The excavation in 2007 was subsequently carried out on a number of small areas, a narrow area to the west of the rectory with a rectangular area to the south and an area to the east (Milbank 2009). The results indicated the site had undergone successive periods of remodelling, each considerably truncating the past, and only the later post-medieval phases of the sites use survived. The deposits included surfaces and wall foundations. No securely dated medieval deposits were recorded. Due to the nature of the excavation, which was to a formation level for the flood compensation are only, the full sequence of deposits above the natural geology were not

examined and it is likely that any earlier phases of activity on the site were preserved *in situ*. Several sherds of medieval pottery and both Mesolithic and Neolithic flints point to some earlier activity in the environs.

Objectives and methodology

The general objectives of the project were to:

Excavate and record all archaeological deposits and features within the areas threatened by the proposed development;

Produce relative and absolute dating and phasing for deposits and features recorded on the site; establish the character of these deposits in attempt to define functional areas on the site such as industrial, domestic, etc; and

Produce information on the economy and local environment and compare and contrast this with the results of other excavations in the region.

The specific research objectives were to answer the following questions:

When was the site first utilised and when was it abandoned?

What is the date and function of the undated deposits observed during the evaluation phase of the project?

What is the nature and extent of Saxon or medieval occupation on the site?

What is the relationship between this site and the nearby Caversham Court?

What is the palaeoenvironmental setting of the area?

Topsoil and other overburden were to be removed using a JCB type machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision to fully expose archaeological deposits. Linear features relating to agricultural activity were to be sampled at 20% if under 5m long and 10% if longer. Linear features defining settlement enclosures were to be sampled at a minimum of 15%. Isolated features such as pits and postholes were to be half sectioned as a minimum.

The Excavation

Topsoil (50) and other overburden (51, 52 and 53) were removed using a JCB machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision. to expose archaeological features cut into or above the natural clayey loam geology.

Beneath the topsoil (50) a 0.24m thick layer of made ground (51) a loose brownish/yellow sand with frequent crushed mortar, flint fragments and gravel was encountered which in turn overlay a layer of subsoil (52) of up to 0.30m thick from which fragments of animal bone and clay pipe were recovered, along with a mixed

group of pottery sherds, the latest of which date from the 19th century. A mortared flint nodule wall (54) was first observed within the subsoil and was 0.40m wide and up to 0.30m high consisting of nodules in horizontal courses with up to four courses preserved. Larger nodules (c. 0.25m across) were present at the base, with smaller ones (c. 0.1m across) higher up [Plates 1 and 2]. The lower courses are less well laid and appear to be foundation whereas the higher courses appear to be the wall proper. No construction cut was observed yet the feature was aligned exactly along the centre of the underlying gully 1003/1004.

The orientation of the wall and underlying gullies matches closely with a remnant of brick wall adjoining the site boundary just to the east (Plate 1) and which appears to have been demolished in relatively recent times.

Beneath the subsoil a firm reddish/orange brown clay layer (53) 0.11m thick was observed in a small area south of wall 54 which contained two small sherds of medieval pottery.

Gully 1000 was aligned WNW–ESE across the entire excavation area, parallel to wall 54 and 4.0m south of it. Two slots (5 and 10) were dug across it and revealed it to be between 0.43m and 0.84m wide and between 0.11m and 0.21m deep. The slots were filled with dark grey sandy silt (59 and 63). No finds were recovered.

Gully 1001 was on the same alignment as 1000. Three slots (4, 6 and 11) were dug and revealed it to be between 0.48m and 0.65m wide and between 0.20m and 0.25m deep. Slot 11 appears to cut slot 10 and slot 4 cuts slot 5 which suggests that the linear curves across gully 1000. The two slots were filled with whitish grey sandy clay (58 and 64) from which two sherds of residual Bronze Age pottery were recovered the latter. Only one cut was observed for these features in the evaluation trench just to the west.

Gully 7 was aligned NW -SE. One slot was dug and revealed it to be 0.25m wide and 0.07m deep. It was cut by Gully 1001. A single sherd of medieval pottery was recovered from the feature.

Gully 1003 was aligned WNW-ESE across the entire excavation area. One slot (12) was dug and revealed it to be 0.70m wide and 0.52m deep. It was filled with dark grey sandy silt (65) but no finds were recovered. It was cut by Gully 1004. Wall 54 appears to have been resting on top of the gully and was on the same line of the feature. Gully 1003 was also parallel to 1000 and 1001.

Gully 1004 was on the same alignment as 1003. One slot (13) was dug across and revealed it to be 0.56m wide and 0.16m deep. It was filled with white grey sandy clay (66) from which a sherd of Bronze Age pottery was recovered. Gully 1004 cuts Gully 1003 and was in turn cut by wall 54.

In the north-west corner of the site was a small cluster of intercutting pits. Pit 2 cut both of pits 1 and 3 but no relationship could be ascertained between pits 1 and 3. Pit 1 was 0.50m in diameter and 0.07m deep. Four sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from its fill (55). Pit 2 was 0.85m in diameter and 0.12m deep. An

assemblage of 21 sherds of medieval pottery was recovered. Pit 3 was 0.90m in diameter and 0.15m deep. Ten sherds of medieval pottery and some animal bone were recovered.

Posthole 8 was 0.35m in diameter and 0.07m deep. No finds were recovered despite being fully excavated.

Finds

Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 45 sherds with a total weight of 776g. It was all medieval or later, apart from three apparently stratified prehistoric sherds. The following fabric types were noted:

F1: **'M40' type ware**. ?Late 11th–14th century (Hinton 1973). Hard, flint and limestone unglazed ware, with a possible kiln sources at Camley Gardens near Maidenhead (Pike 1965) and Denham in Buckinghamshire (Mellor 1994, 86). Known at numerous sites in south Oxfordshire and Berkshire. 26 sherds, 372g.

F2: **Ashampstead ware**, 12th–14th century (Mepharm and Heaton 1995). Sandy wares produced at a manufactory c. 15km to the west of Reading, the main products being jars and highly decorated glazed jugs, the latter often having painted geometric slip designs. 12 sherds, 270g.

F4: **Red Earthenware**, 16th–19th century. Fine sandy earthenware, usually with a brown or green glaze, occurring in a range of utilitarian forms. Such 'country pottery' was first made in the 16th century, and in some areas continued in use until the 19th century. 2 sherds, 22g.

F5: **Iron-glazed Earthenware**, late 17th – 18th century. Range of large, heavy utilitarian vessels, mainly pancheons, with a thick, black, internal glaze. 1 sherd, 7g.

19th: **Miscellaneous 19th and 20th century wares**. Mass-produced white earthenwares, stonewares etc. 4 sherds, 105g.

In addition, three sherds (7g) of coarse, flint-tempered, hand-built pottery of Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age date were also noted.

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Appendix 2. All the post-Roman fabrics are typical finds in the region, at site, such as in Reading (Blinkhorn 2007). The sherds of Ashampstead Ware from context (56) are all from the same vessel, a tripod pitcher with a strap handle with an inlaid plait. Many of the sherds of M40 ware have the vertical and diagonal combing which is typical of the tradition.

Overall, it would appear that medieval pottery deposition was largely limited to the late 11th – 12th/early 13th century. Certainly, Surrey Whitewares, a mid-13th–15th century ware which is fairly common at sites in the county (Pearce and Vince 1988) is entirely absent, indicating that medieval activity had ceased at the site before the *floruit* of such pottery in Berkshire.

Struck flint by Steve Ford

A single struck flint flake was recovered from the subsoil (52). It is a narrow flake, possibly but not conclusively of Mesolithic or earlier Neolithic date.

Animal Bone by Ceri Falys

A total of 26 pieces of bone from three contexts were present for analysis, weighing 370g (Appendix 3). The overall preservation of the remains was good, although the numerous portions of ribs present were highly fragmented.

All fragments were subjected to osteological analysis, which aimed at assigning each piece of bone to skeletal element, side, and species where possible. Each fragment was initially separated into one of three size categories: “large”, “medium”, and “small”. Horse and cow are represented by the large size category, sheep/goat and pigs represent the medium size category. The minimum number of individuals (MNI) was determined based on duplication of skeletal elements.

The minimum number of animals present in this assemblage was three: one horse, one cow, and one sheep/goat. All of these individuals were represented by bone fragments in subsoil 52. Horse was represented by ten fragments of mandible and associated teeth. A single cow proximal phalanx was also present, while the sheep/goat was represented by a distal portion on metacarpal and a distal tibia. Pit fills 56 and 57 both contained fragments of large, unidentified animal ribs. The single rib fragment in context 56 (fill of pit 2) displayed extensive new bone formation on the visceral surface. No evidence of butchery practice was observed

Conclusion

The excavation has revealed a small number of linear features, pits and a wall foundation dating from the medieval period and possibly into post-medieval times. The deposits appear to reflect the presence of the medieval occupation which was anticipated from the historic evidence for the general environs of the site. The area investigated was only of modest extent and the deposits revealed can only represent a small part of the medieval settlement, presumably a part of a yard area with any habited structures located elsewhere.

The two straight linear features appear to represent property boundaries, one of which appears to be long-lived, having been re-defined by a wall that appears to have been present on maps dating from the late 19th century until recent times. It is possible, but considered much less likely in the context of this site, that the two features represent a trackway. Both boundaries had been re-defined and it is possible that the northern boundary (with the wall) replaced the southern boundary, though the large (4m) gap between the two is awkward to reconcile if a simple re-definition is envisaged. These boundaries lie parallel to Church Road and presumably reflect the rear of properties fronting Church St immediately to the north. It is also possible, from a consideration of the boundaries depicted on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map (1877), that our boundaries reflect a long

thin plot aligned east-west with its frontage to the west on The Warren just to the south of the Rectory (Fig. 5). It had been considered that the post-medieval and modern Rectory and large garden would also be broadly indicative of an earlier, medieval pattern: land plots to the east, aligned north-south, are similarly narrow. The evidence of the boundary features here does not by itself overturn this hypothesis, but it does raise the possibility that the current layout is a late or post-medieval development which has been enlarged to incorporate abandoned medieval properties.

A few sherds of Bronze Age pottery and a flint flake add to the small amount of struck flint recovered during the previous investigations to indicate a low level of earlier prehistoric activity on the site

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APPENDIX 1: Feature details

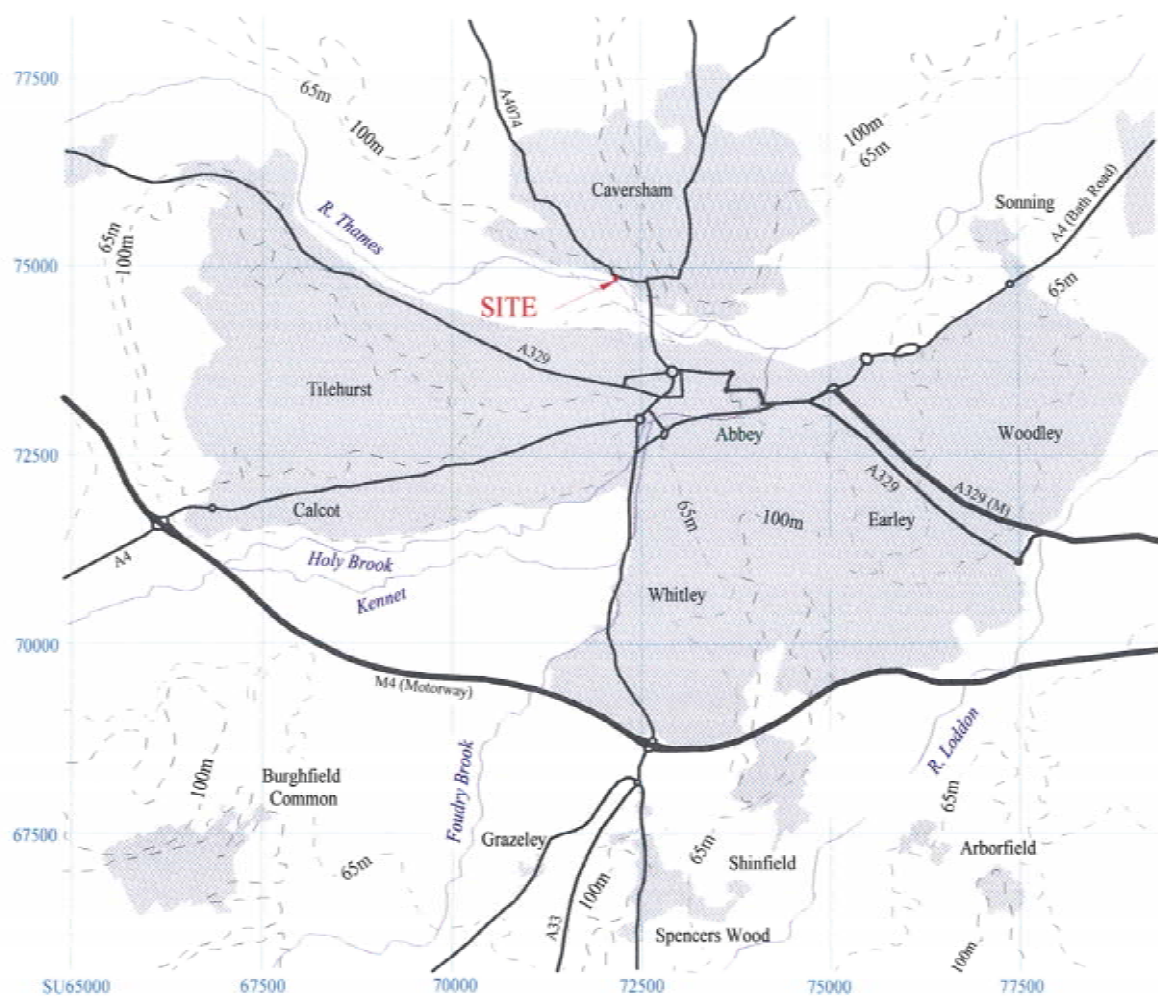
<i>Group</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
		51	Made Ground	Modern	
		52	Subsoil	19th century (or later)	Pottery
		53	Layer	Medieval or later	Pottery
	1	55	Pit	Medieval 11 th -14 th Century	Pottery
	2	56	Pit	Medieval 11 th -14 th Century	Pottery
	3	57	Pit	Medieval 11 th -14 th Century	Pottery
	8	62	Posthole	Unphased	None
	9	54	Wall	Medieval/Post Medieval	None
1000	4, 6, 10	58, 60, 63	Gully	Medieval	Stratigraphy
1001	5, 11	59, 64	Gully	Medieval	Stratigraphy (Bronze Age pottery)
1002	7	61	Gully	12 th -14 th Century	Pottery
1003	12	65	Gully		None
1004	13	66	Gully	Medieval/Post Medieval	Stratigraphy (Bronze Age pottery)

APPENDIX 2: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

		BA		F1		F2		F4		F5		19th c	
Cut	Deposit	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt
	52							2	22	1	7	4	105
	53					2	20						
1	55			4	32								
2	56			12	140	9	248						
3	57			10	200								
7	61					1	2						
11	64	2	5										
13	66	1	2										
	Total	3	7	26	372	12	270	2	22	1	7	4	105

APPENDIX 3: – inventory of animal bone

Cut	Deposit	No. frags	Wt (g)	Horse	Cow	Sheep/goat	Large	Medium
-	52	14	282	10	1	2	-	1
2	56	1	12		-	-	1	
3	57	11	76		-	-	11	
Totals/ MNI		26	370	1	1	1	-	



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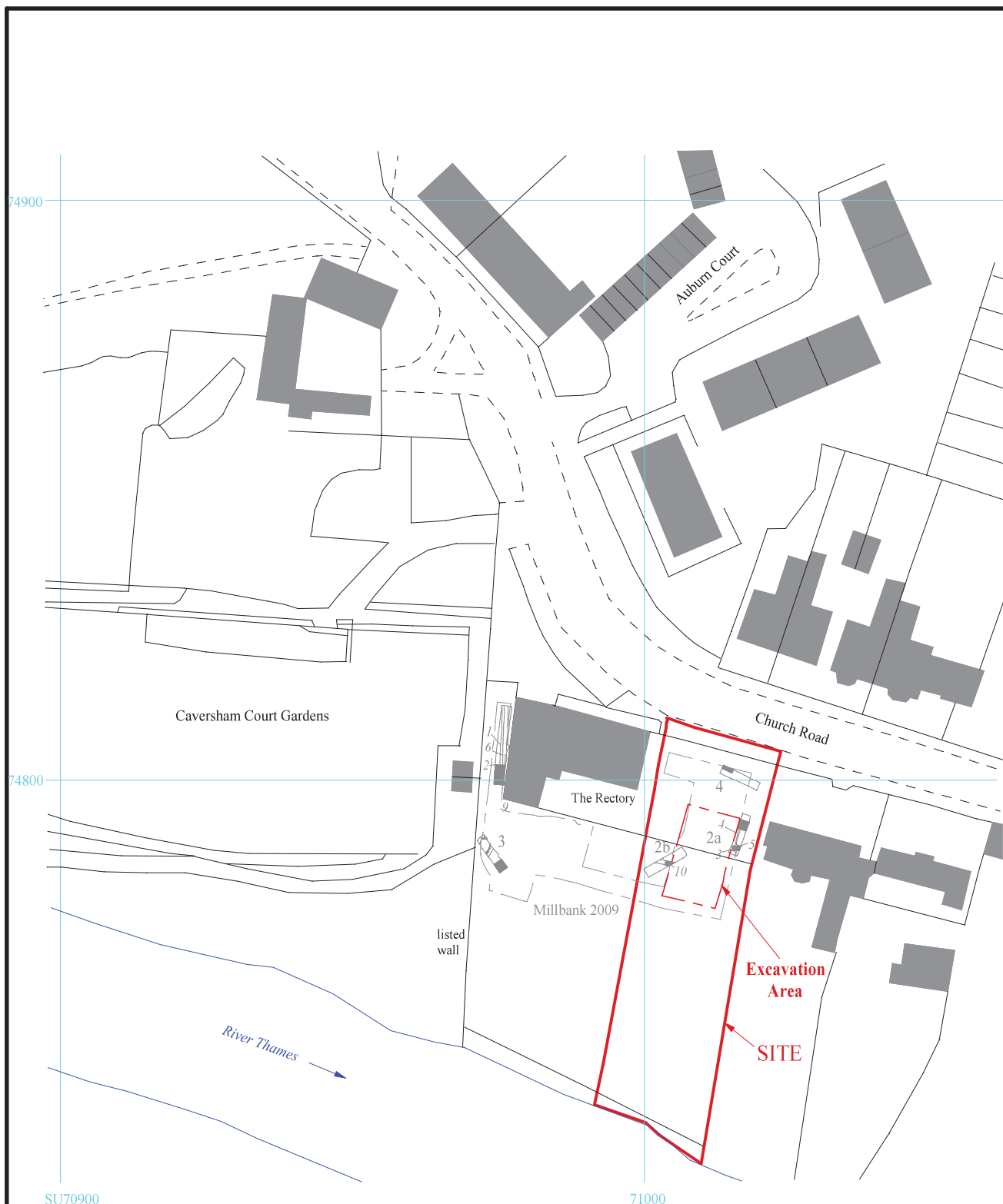
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Figure 1. Location of site in the environs of Reading

0 5km



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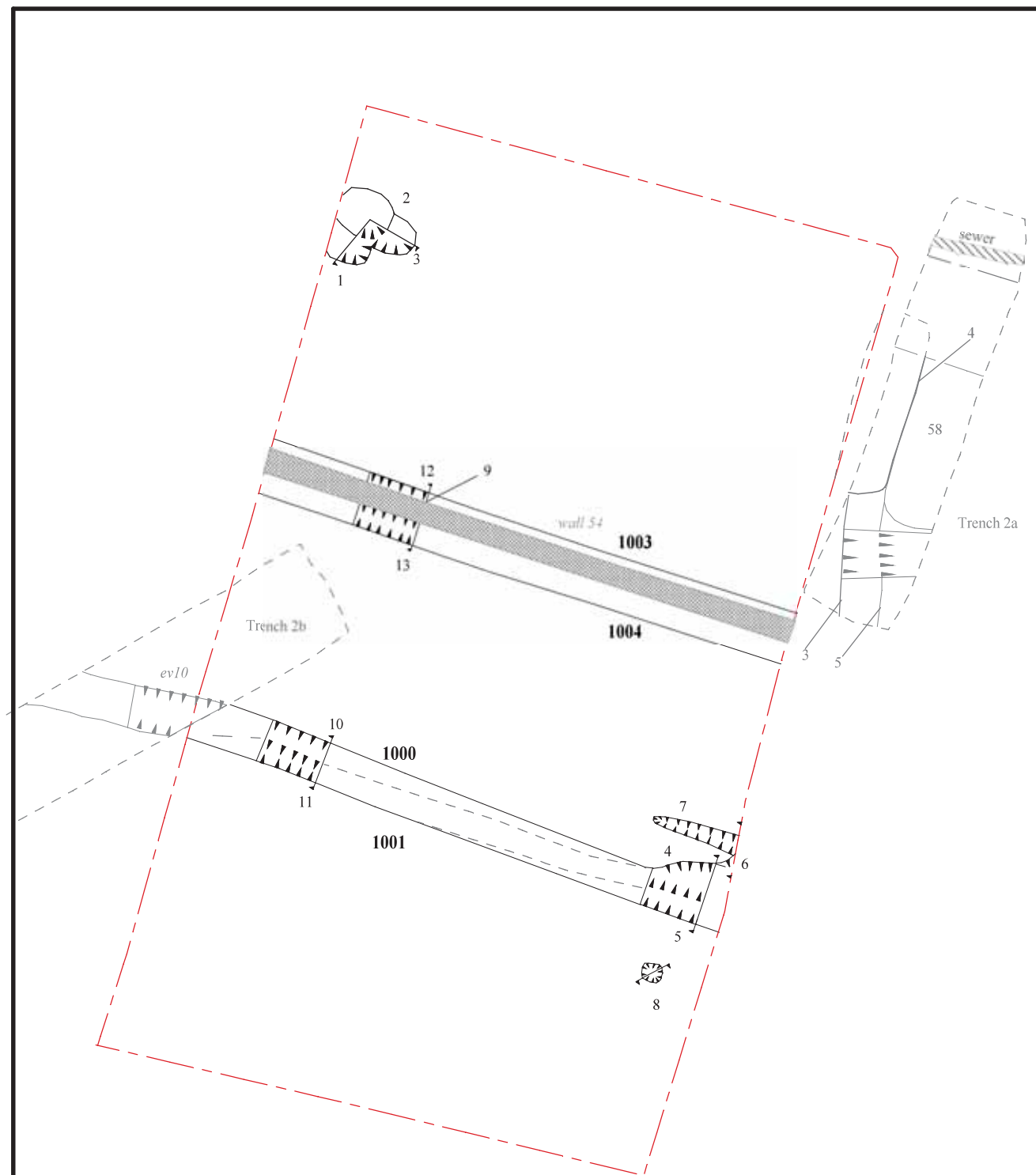
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Figure 2. Location of excavation area and previous investigations on the site.

0 50m

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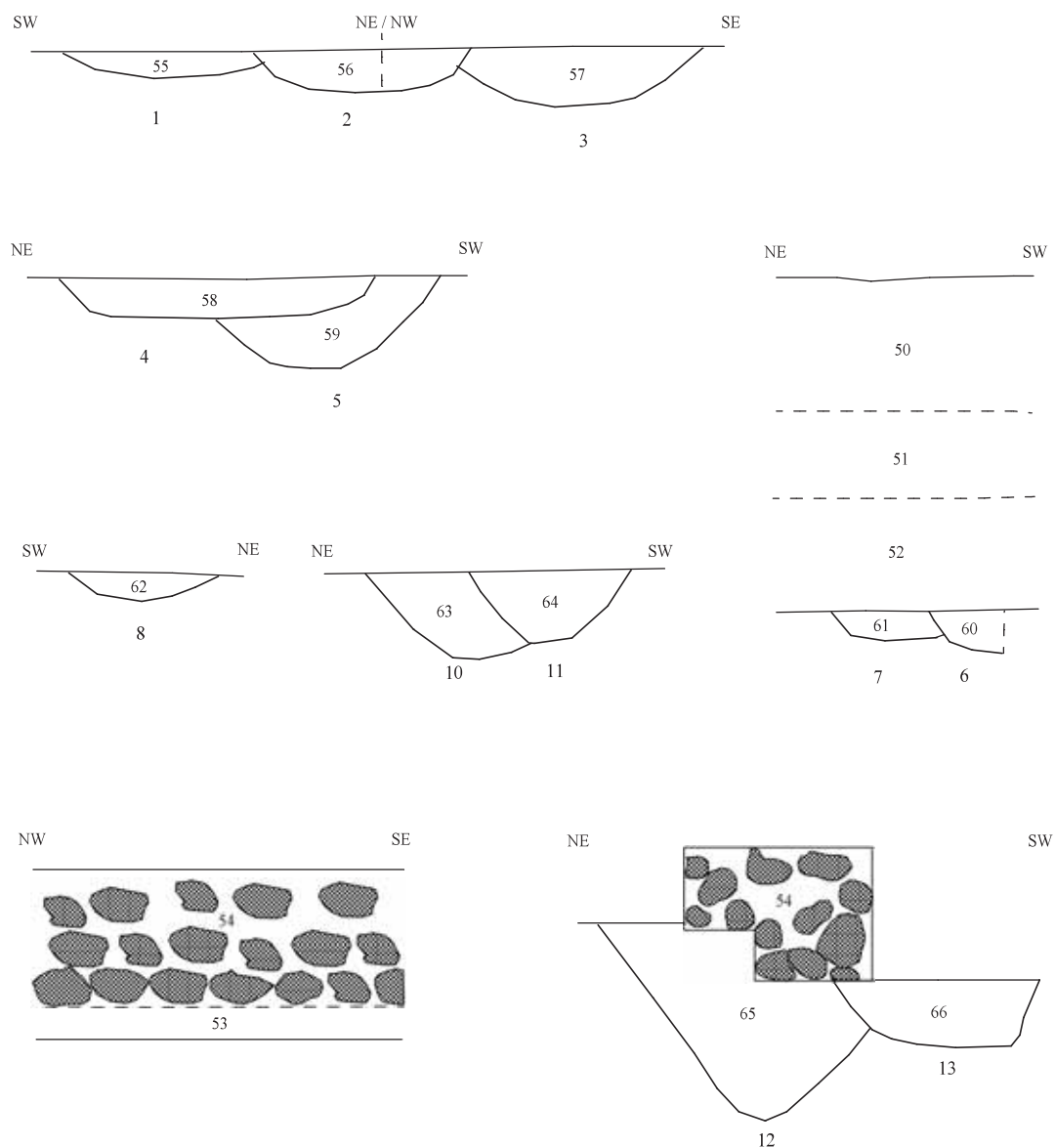
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Figure 3. Excavated Features

0 5m

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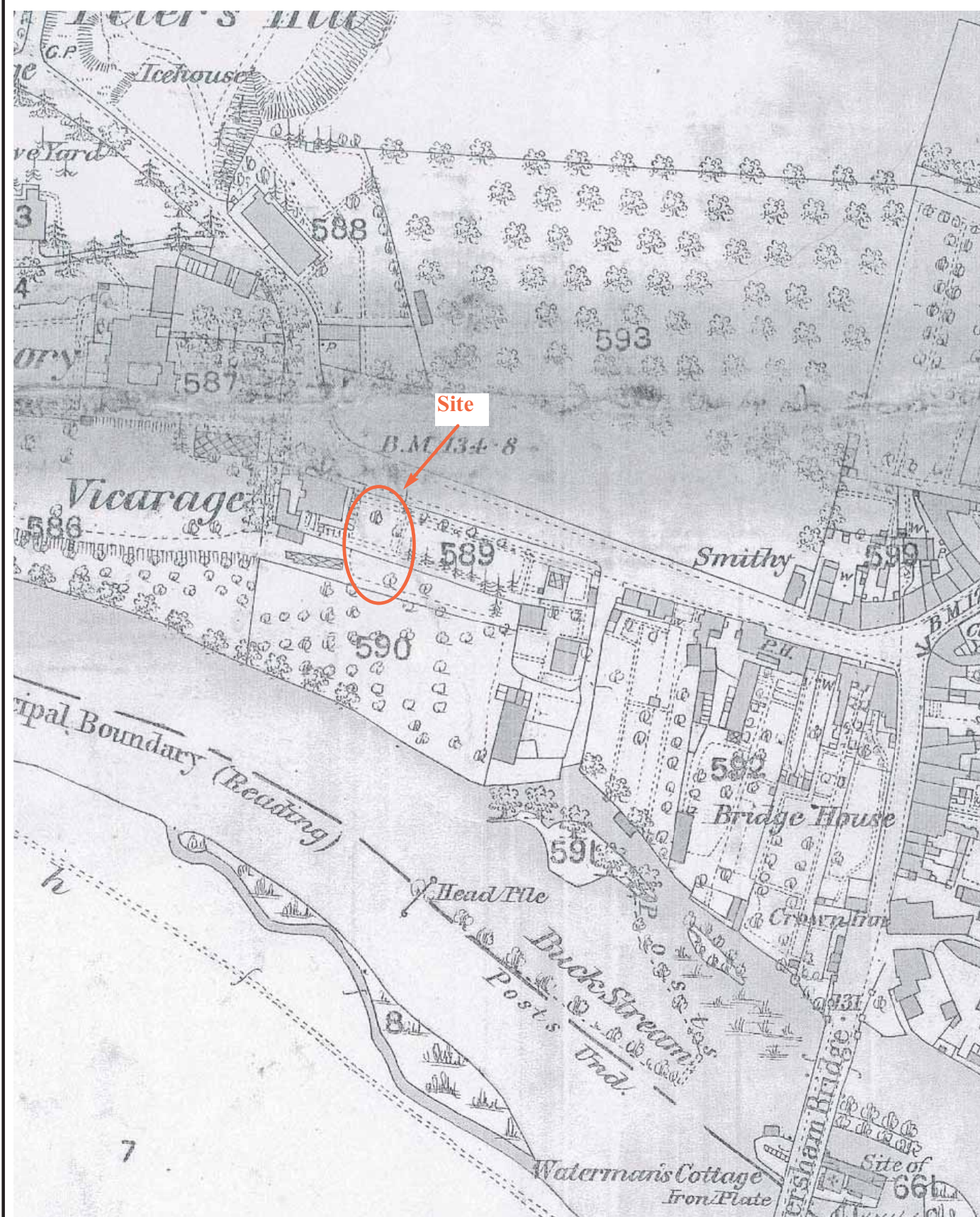
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Figure 4. Sections

0 1m

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Land adjoining The Rectory, Church Road, Caversham,
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Archaeological Excavation
Ordnance Survey First Edition, 1877

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Plate 1. Excavation area looking north east.



Plate 2. Face of wall 54, looking north, Scales: 2m and 0.3m.

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**Land adjoining The Rectory, Church Road, Caversham,
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Plates 1 and 2.**

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Plate 3. Ditches 4 and 5, looking east, Scales: 1m and 0.3m.



Plate 4. Wall (54) and cut 9 over ditches 12 and 13, looking east, Scales: 0.5m and 0.3m.

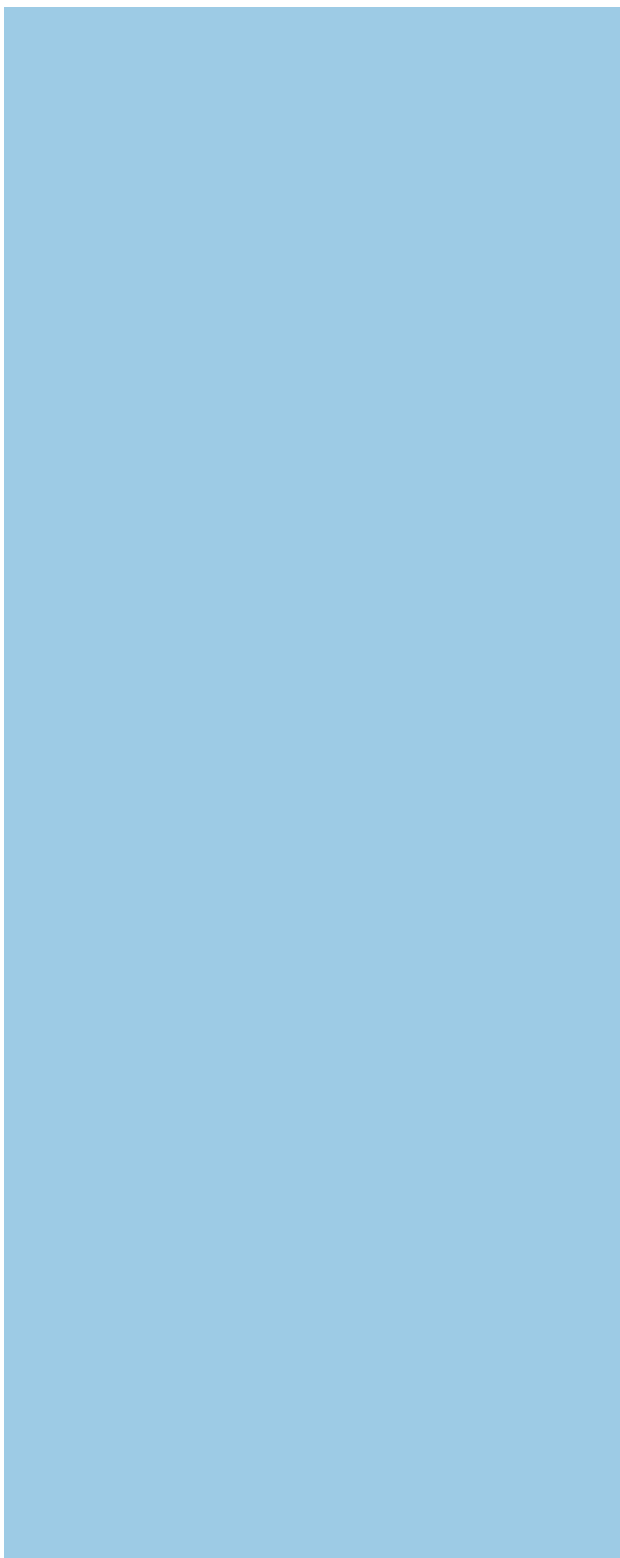
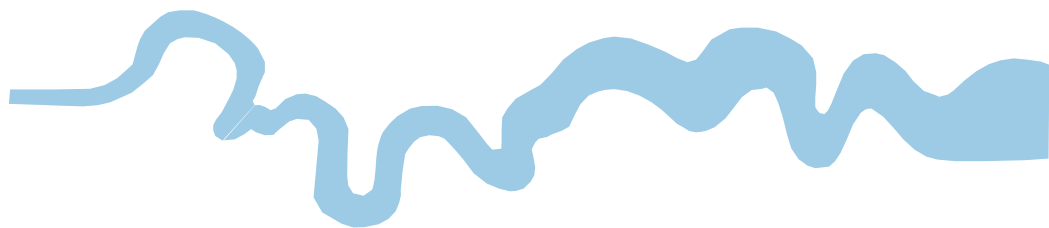
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**Land adjoining The Rectory, Church Road, Caversham,
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Plates 3 and 4.**

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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
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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