THAMES VALLEY

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

SERVICES

Taylor Court, 48 Tilehurst Road, Reading, Berkshire

Archaeological Evaluation

by Tim Dawson

Site Code: TCR11/111

(SU 7040 7315)

Taylor Court, 48 Tilehurst Road, Reading, Berkshire

An Archaeological Evaluation

for Southern Housing Group

by TimDawson

ThamesValleyArchaeologicalServices

Ltd

SiteCodeTCR11/111

April 2012

Summary

Site name: Taylor Court, 48 Tilehurst Road, Reading, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 7040 7315

Site activity: Archaeological evaluation

Date and duration of project: 25th - 26th April 2012

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Tim Dawson

Site code: TCR 11/111

Area of site: *c*.0.6ha

Summary of results: Four trenches were excavated down to the top of the natural geology, each with a deeper test pit at one end. No archaeological finds or features were identified although *in situ* river terrace gravels were uncovered in Trench 2 in the south of the site.

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

Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford✓ 30.04.12
	Steve Preston✓ 30.04.12

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Taylor Court, 48 Tilehurst Road, Reading, Berkshire
An Archaeological Evaluation

by Tim Dawson

Report 11/111b

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at Taylor Court, 48 Tilehurst Road, Reading, Berkshire (SU 7040 7315) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Colin Thomas, of Southern Housing Group, Spire Court, Albion Way, Horsham, West Sussex, RH12 1JW.

Planning permission (11/00484/FUL) has been granted by Reading Borough Council for the demolition of Taylor Court and the subsequent construction of 33 new apartments and houses utilising much of the footprint of the previous structure. The development is subject to a requirement that an archaeological desk-based assessment and watching brief be submitted and approved by the Council prior to the commencement of any works on the site.

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 Borough Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Ms Mary Neale, Archaeology Officer at Berkshire Archaeology. The fieldwork was undertaken by Tim Dawson and Jacqueline Pitt on 25th and 26th April 2012 and the site code is TCR 11/111. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Reading Museum in due course.

An archaeological desk-based assessment was undertaken to determine the archaeological potential of the site and support any future work (Dawson 2011). The report concluded that the site lies within an area of moderate potential for the presence of post-glacial archaeological deposits, but this potential is tempered to an unknown extent by the presence of previous structures on the site which have been terraced into the slope. The site also lies on a gravel outcrop which has the potential for Palaeolithic finds and deposits, though it is unlikely that the proposed development would impact to any significant extent on any of these deeply buried horizons.

Location, topography and geology

The development area is centred on NGR SU 7040 7315. Topographically the site lies on the northern face of a plateau between the rivers Thames, Kennet and Pang at a height of approximately 60m above Ordnance Datum.

The geology underlying the area is the border between plateau gravel forming the Lynch Hill terrace (Wymer 1999, map 6) in the southern half of the site and Reading Beds in the northern half (BGS 1971). This was confirmed through field observation.

Approximately one quarter of the site was occupied by the demolished buildings of Taylor Court with the remainder being an access road and garages, also demolished, on the eastern edge of the site (Fig. 2. These are set in gardens with an area of *c.* 0.6ha which consists primarily of lawns with shrubs and trees. The garden appears not to have been heavily landscaped and still follows the general contours of the hill, which drops *c.*2.5m from south to north, and appears to have not been affected by the demolition of Taylor Court, of which only the concrete base plates remain. The east-west range of Taylor Court sat on top of the ground but the north-south block was deeply terraced into the hillside. Land uses within the immediate surrounding area were generally residential with Tilehurst Road bordering the site on its southern edge.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site stems from its location within the archaeologically rich Thames Valley with a wealth of sites and finds from both prehistoric and later periods. As noted above, the potential for the site has been investigated in a desk-based assessment (Dawson 2011). There are several entries of archaeological interest in the Berkshire Historic Environment Record relating to the surrounding area, though there are none on the site itself. Stray finds and reports of occupation and burial sites of various periods have been recorded, especially from the many quarry sites in the area. At Grovelands Pit, 1km to the west, for example, both Bronze Age and Roman deposits were encountered. The higher gravel terraces of the Thames Valley are particularly noteworthy for the presence of Palaeolithic flint and stone tools, representing some of the earliest known human occupation in the British Isles. Many flint finds and some rare faunal remains from the Palaeolithic period were also found at Grovelands Pit at the base of the gravel deposit (Lynch Hill terrace) (Wymer 1968, 155).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was twofold: to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological or palaeoenvironmental deposits within the area of development undisturbed by the previous terracing; and to determine if any areas of gravel terrace have survived at the southern end of the site.

Four 10m-long trenches were dug by a JCB with 1.6m-wide ditching bucket in positions around the existing concrete building base plates (Fig. 3). Each trench was excavated down to the top of the natural geology with a deeper test pit section dug at one end in order to investigate the nature of the uncovered geology. The machining of each trench was supervised at all times by an archaeologist and spoil heaps were monitored for finds. All potential archaeological features were hand-cleaned and, if they still showed potential, excavated. A Quaternary geology specialist was present in order to describe the gravel deposits. Due to the depths of the test pits the sides were stepped to ensure that they could still be entered safely to allow for close inspection of the exposed geology.

Results

All four trenches were dug with minor alterations to their positions, lengths and orientations due to obstructions, as agreed after consultation with the monitor. The trenches ranged in length from 6.10m to 12.00m and depth between 1.12m and 2.62m in the test pits.

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

Trench 1 (Fig. 3)

Trench 1 was aligned south-north and was 6.10m long and 1.12m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.60m of made ground (demolition rubble mixed with soil), 0.05m of concrete and 0.09m of red clayey sand made ground overlying light yellow-red clayey sand natural geology. A modern bitumen sewage pipe ran the length of the centre of the trench into a concrete manhole shaft at the northern end of the trench. No finds were recovered.

Trench 2 (Figs. 3 and 4, Plate 1)

Trench 2 was aligned southwest-northeast and was 10.00m long and 1.04m deep with a test pit at the south-western end to a depth of 2.62m. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.33m of topsoil, 0.61m of made ground (mid grey-brown silty clay with frequent inclusions of modern rubbish and building material and lenses of lighter and darker material) overlying mid yellow-red *in situ* terrace gravel with medium coarse flint nodules but no sand lenses, which in turn overlaid light mottled yellow-brown/green-grey with pink patches clay. No finds were recovered or features identified.

Trench 3 (Fig 3, Plate 2)

Trench 3 was aligned south-north and was 12.00m long and 0.86m deep with a test pit at the south end to a depth of 1.86m. The stratigraphy at the north end consisted of 0.20m of topsoil and 0.60m of made ground of similar composition to that observed in Trench 2 overlying light yellow-red clayey sand natural geology. The stratigraphy exposed in the test pit at the south end of the trench consisted 0.10m of topsoil, 0.58m made ground, 0.08m yellow-red clay and 0.20m of a 50:50 mix of yellow-red clay and gravel overlying the clayey sand natural geology. Much modern disturbance was identified in Trench 3 with a dark patch of ground containing iron and bitumen pipes, iron sheets, fragments of china and the remains of a wheelbarrow being uncovered between 6.20 and 9.25m from the south end of the trench. No finds or features of archaeological interest were identified.

Trench 4 (Fig 3)

Trench 4 was aligned south-north and was 10.10m long and 1.07m deep with a test pit at the south end extending to a depth of 1.58m. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.89m of made ground (demolition rubble mixed with soil), 0.14m of fine gravel and 0.15m of yellow-red clay/gravel as seen in Trench 3 overlying light yellow-red with pink patches clayey sand natural geology. A modern concrete manhole shaft was encountered 7.30m from the south end of the trench resulting in the trench being dug in a dogleg around it. No finds were recovered.

Pleistocene issues report by Simon Collcutt

The full report can be found in Appendix 2 below. In summary, the gravel deposits had been deposited by fast flowing water and lay within a palaeochannel. There was no evidence of Palaeolithic archaeological finds and no possibility of in-situ deposits.

Conclusion

The desk-based assessment concluded that the site had moderate potential for post-glacial archaeological deposits. However, the archaeological evaluation showed that the upper stratigraphic levels had been truncated during the 19th and 20th centuries, presumably in the course of terracing the plot for its previous occupants. Artefacts recovered, but not retained, from this made ground and the areas of redeposited natural geology pointed to this late date. The trial trenching also revealed that in some areas of the site the geological deposits had remained relatively undisturbed with *in situ* Middle Pleistocene river terrace gravel being present in Trench 2 in the south-western corner of the site. Study of these deposits concluded that they represent material laid down towards the middle of a very fast-flowing watercourse over the course of a few seasons of spring melt. This

interpretation points towards conditions that would make it very unlikely for *in situ* evidence of early human occupation to be present on the site.

This absence of deposits of archaeological significance, both post-glacial and older, indicates that the proposed development will have no impact on the archaeology of the area and, therefore, that no further work is required.

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APPENDIX 1: Trench details

0m at south or south-west end

Trench	Length (m)	Breadth (m)	Depth (m)	Comment
1	6.10	1.60	1.12	0-0.60m made ground, 0.60-0.65m concrete, 0.65-0.74m made ground, 0.74m+ natural geology. No finds or features.
2	10.00	1.60	1.04 2.62	0-0.33m topsoil, 0.33-0.94m made ground, 0.94-2.42m terrace gravel, 2.42m+ natural geology. No finds or features.
3	12.00	1.60	0.86 1.86	0-0.10m topsoil, 0.10-0.68m made ground, 0.68-0.76m redeposited clay, 0.76-0.96m redeposited gravel, 0.96m+ natural geology. No finds or features.
4	10.10	1.60	1.07 1.58	0-0.89m made ground, 0.89-1.03m fine gravel, 1.03-1.18m redeposited gravel, 1.18m+ natural geology. No finds or features.

APPENDIX 2: Pleistocene Issues Report

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TAYLOR COURT
48 TILEHURST ROAD
READING

(Site Ref. TCR11/11)

PLEISTOCENE ISSUES

Produced by Oxford Archaeological Associates Limited
under the direction of

S.N. Collcutt
MA(Hons) DEA DPhil FSA

Commissioned by
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Limited

April 2012

1. Introduction

1.1 In February, 2012, Mr. T. Dawson (Thames Valley Archaeological Services Limited) commissioned Oxford Archaeological Associates Limited to provide technical support on Pleistocene issues arising at a housing development site at Taylor Court (NGR SU 7040 7315), 48 Tilehurst Road, Reading. Accordingly, on the 26th April, Dr. S.N. Collcutt (OAA) attended the site and observed exposures in the four TVAS trial trenches. Figure 1 shows the approximate positioning of the trenches in relation to the footprints of the previous building and the intended new development; in the event, these locations were slightly adapted to reflect actual site condition (cf. main TVAS report). The present report documents the Pleistocene geological contexts and geoarchaeological implications.

2. Background

2.1 The underlying geology was originally mapped as "plateau gravel" but was subsequently reclassified as part of the Lynch Hill Terrace of the Middle Thames (cf. Wymer 1968, 1999), possibly dating from MIS 8 (which would be consistent with the interpretation of the Lynch Hill Member in Gibbard 1999). The underlying (soft) basement is composed of Tertiary (assumed Reading Beds) shallow marine strata (BGS 1971); results from geological boreholes are included in Dawson (2011). The site lies on the northern slope of the interfluve between the Thames, Kennet and Pang, at an altitude of just below 60 m AOD.

2.2 The formerly extensive Grovelands Sand & Gravel Pit lay approximately a kilometre to the west (Tilehurst Road, centred at SU 694 732) of the present development site. The stratigraphy of this pit was never reported in detail (cf. Stevens 1881; Evans 1897; Treacher 1904; Peake 1931); Roe (1981) noted that there was some suggestion that reworked Lynch Hill gravels had slumped over younger Taplow Terrace material. The important point in the present context was that a relatively large number of Lower Palaeolithic flint artefacts were recovered, mostly during the late nineteenth century, some in sharp condition and others in rolled condition (with a possibility that there might be some typological/technological difference in the assemblages with differing preservation states). This was also the only site in the area to produce significant quantities of large mammal fauna. It would appear that at least most of the finds were made low in the sequence; a depth below the contemporary surface (this being at "75 feet" above the Thames at this point, that is, at c.60 m AOD) of "13 feet" (c.4 m) was reported. Wymer (1968) noted that some of the bone and artifact finds were reported as being 'associated', lying in sand about two feet from the base of the gravel.

2.3 Ford (2010) has reported a site adjacent to Grovelands at 13–25 Kent Road (SU 6957 7310 and thus definitely on the current Thames valley-side), at which reddish brown sand, with extremely small frequent rounded or subangular gravels, was observed in a shallow west-east channel-form at the base of the Pleistocene material (cut into Tertiary yellow fine sands) down to an altitude of 58.8 m AOD or slightly lower.

3. Taylor Court Lithostratigraphy

3.1 The superficial deposits in all four trial trenches are made ground of various types, the sequence in T2 appearing to show several separate fill events. There are no clear traces of original soil horizons, implying a degree (>30 cm thick) of erosion associated with the ground-making.

3.2 The basal sediments in all four trial trenches are relatively uniform, dense (over-compacted) fine sands and silts with clay partings, or thicker clayey silt lenses, and fine granule stringers; at a sub-millimetric scale, individual laminae show rapid textural changes (equivalent to changes in flow stage). These deposits represent shallow marine to lagoonal facies, presumed to be part of the Reading Beds (Tertiary).

3.3 In the northern part of the development site, lower on the slope, made ground tends to lie immediately or almost immediately above the Tertiary sediments. In T4 and T3, there is a relatively thin (10-35 cm) intervening slope deposit. This is a diamict, containing fine to medium gravel (including edge-rounded but irregular clasts, marine-chattered well-rounded pebbles, and more angular sub-clasts of the other types). The matrix is a gritty sandy clay/silt, commonly providing matrix-support in the generally chaotic (clasts at all angles) fabric. The base (contact with the Tertiaries) is sharp and wavy, locally slightly convoluted. A typical sequence from T3 is shown in Fig.2.

3.4 Near the highest point in the development site, the sequence in T2 shows the normal superficial made ground and basal Tertiaries (in this case a rather clayey, grey/pink silt) but there is no intervening diamict. Instead, there is a thickness of some 140 cm of bedded gravels. Overall, these gravels are very similar, from top to bottom, but comprise 4-5 cycles of weakly differentiated couplets. The lower unit in each couplet contains clast-supported medium to coarse-medium gravel (dominant flint, with quartz and quartzites, rare sandstone), the irregular/nodular flint being quite edge-rounded and reworked Tertiary marine (chattered) pebbles (in all lithologies) being relatively common. There is no graded bedding in this material and rare imbrication is local and unconvincing in respect of flow direction. The matrix is medium to coarse sand with dispersed clay, with practically no structure (i.e. no laminations). The upper unit of each couplet is more of a pea gravel in clayey sand, with less continuous clast-support (most obvious in groups of larger elements), with weak internal bedding only. The boundaries between the units in each couplet appear welded; the boundaries between couplet cycles are rather diffuse but more or less horizontal. There is a band of slightly larger clasts (coarse nodular flint gravel) at the base of one cycle (but not the lowest in the series), which is traceable over all sections of the trench; indeed, the structure/fabric of all these gravels seems persistent in the exposures, indicating a minimum 2-3 m lateral extent in facies geometry (i.e. the original channel-forms were wider than this). The complete lack of discrete sand or silt lenses, and of any cross-bedding, is noteworthy. A typical sequence from T2 is shown in Fig.3.

4. Discussion

4.1 The gravel body in T2 represents generally quite fast deposition, in a relatively high-energy, aggressive fluvial context: the whole 1.4 m interval could have been deposited in only a few seasons (each couplet probably being the result of a single spring melt), possibly spread over only a few decades. There is no obvious bank collapse material, suggesting that there were no stable (subaerial) surfaces close-by. There are no ice-wedge casts or other ground ice structures. However, it should be remembered that no rivers in the southern part of England currently carry even coarse sand, let alone gravel, such that the present observations imply a Pleistocene age under at least 'cool' conditions. The diffuse red banding (Fe-hydroxides) in the lower parts of the gravel body is diagenetic and may represent quite recent ground-water levels.

4.2 The diamict seen in T3 and T4 is the surviving trace (probably originally much thicker) of slope mass-movement ('solifluction') deposits. The textural range and generally sharp base imply the involvement of ground ice in a periglacial environment; there are also both

horizontal lenses and vertical pipes of slightly finer (clayier) material in the underlying Tertiaries, which are probably the result of Pleistocene ground ice (plausibly of the same period as that which produced the solifluction). Note that such diamict is often referred to in the professional literature as "head" (in older works, the term "trail" may also include such material).

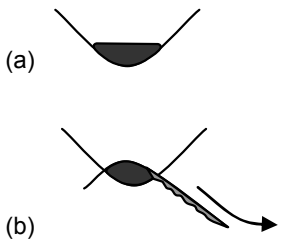
4.3 Both the exposed sections and the spoil tip were examined for material of interest. No struck flint whatsoever was noted. No bone or shell material was present, nor were there any chalk 'ghosts'. There were no 'soft' organic residues (fibrous or amorphous) and no mineralised replacement features, nor were there any penecontemporaneous bioturbation structures in the gravels.

4.4 It is concluded that the gravel body is likely to represent a very short incision event in the Middle Pleistocene, after which the river shifted laterally and never returned. This incision reached 57.94 m AOD. The fluvial conditions evidenced would not be conducive to the preservation of secondary artefact assemblages (i.e. material eroded from a nearby primary site) or to the concentration of artefactual material in tertiary context; were sparse artefacts to be present in this body, they would likely represent a geographic and temporal mixture. The long-term burial context seems to have been reasonably well aerated and mildly acidic, such that bones and shell would not easily survive (unless highly mineralised). There are no occurrences of reduced (fine) sediment in which 'soft' organic structures might have survived; furthermore, there are no mineralised traces, suggesting that organics were never abundant in the first place. The lack of well-sorted sand bodies means that techniques such as OSL (optically stimulated luminescence) dating would be most unlikely to give reliable results; the same is true with respect to the lack of finer-grained material for palaeomagnetic analysis.

4.5 This having been said, it is reiterated that the Taylor Court site is relatively close to the former Grovelands Pit and lies at approximately the same altitude. Pleistocene fluvial contexts are extremely variable laterally, such that a low energy 'pocket' (perhaps representing a backwater or even a sheltered strand area) might survive only a few tens of metres away. Given the possibility of a rare archaeological site, perhaps of national significance, rapid assessment of other similar locations in the vicinity, where and if the opportunity should arise, would appear to be a proportional response.

4.6 The solifluction material ("head") in the northern part of the development site reached altitudes below (58.07 m AOD in T3 and 57.43 m AOD in T4) the incision base of the fluvial gravels in T2. This proves that the diamict and associated ground ice evidence significantly post-date (probably by one or more MIS stages) the river gravels [1].

[1] River gravels would, of course, have lain originally in a valley bottom (a). In the absence of regional subsidence (as in the Reading area), general tectonic (isostatic) uplift would have occurred with time (as 'mass' was eroded from land surfaces and the earth's continental crust 'rebounded' in response) and local rivers would have cut downwards accordingly. But the old gravels would have been more difficult to erode than the relatively soft Tertiaries, so that the new valleys would have become displaced laterally. In today's topography, the old gravels therefore often lie as a 'cap' to the high ground, with derived "head" draped down the new valley side (b). Renewed uplift, lateral shift and down-cutting might result in the 'staircase' form of a standard Pleistocene terrace sequence, oldest at the top and the slopes draped with variable thicknesses and generations of "head".



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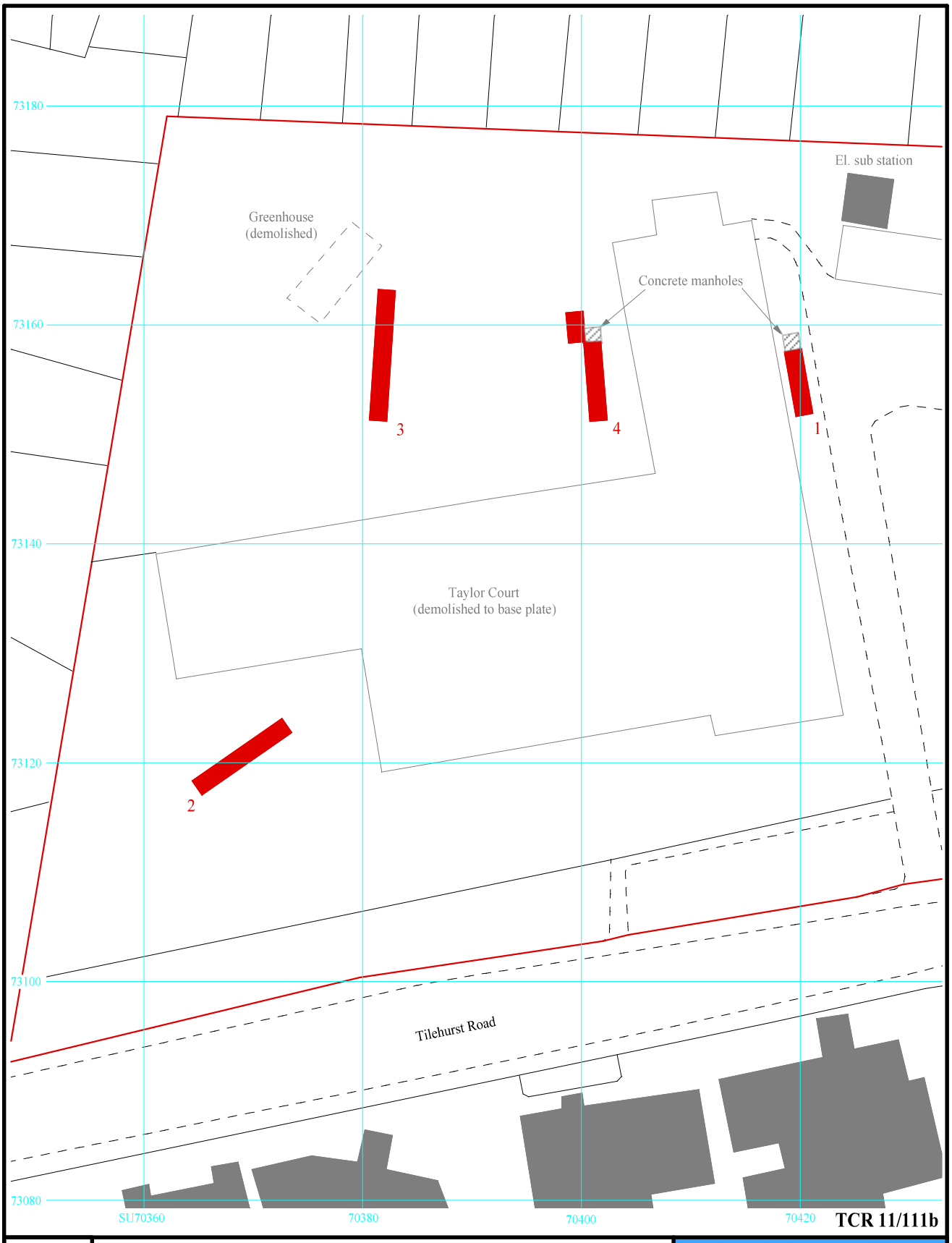

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Taylor Court, 48 Tilehurst Road, Reading, Berkshire, 2012
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Figure 1. Location of trenches.

0 25m

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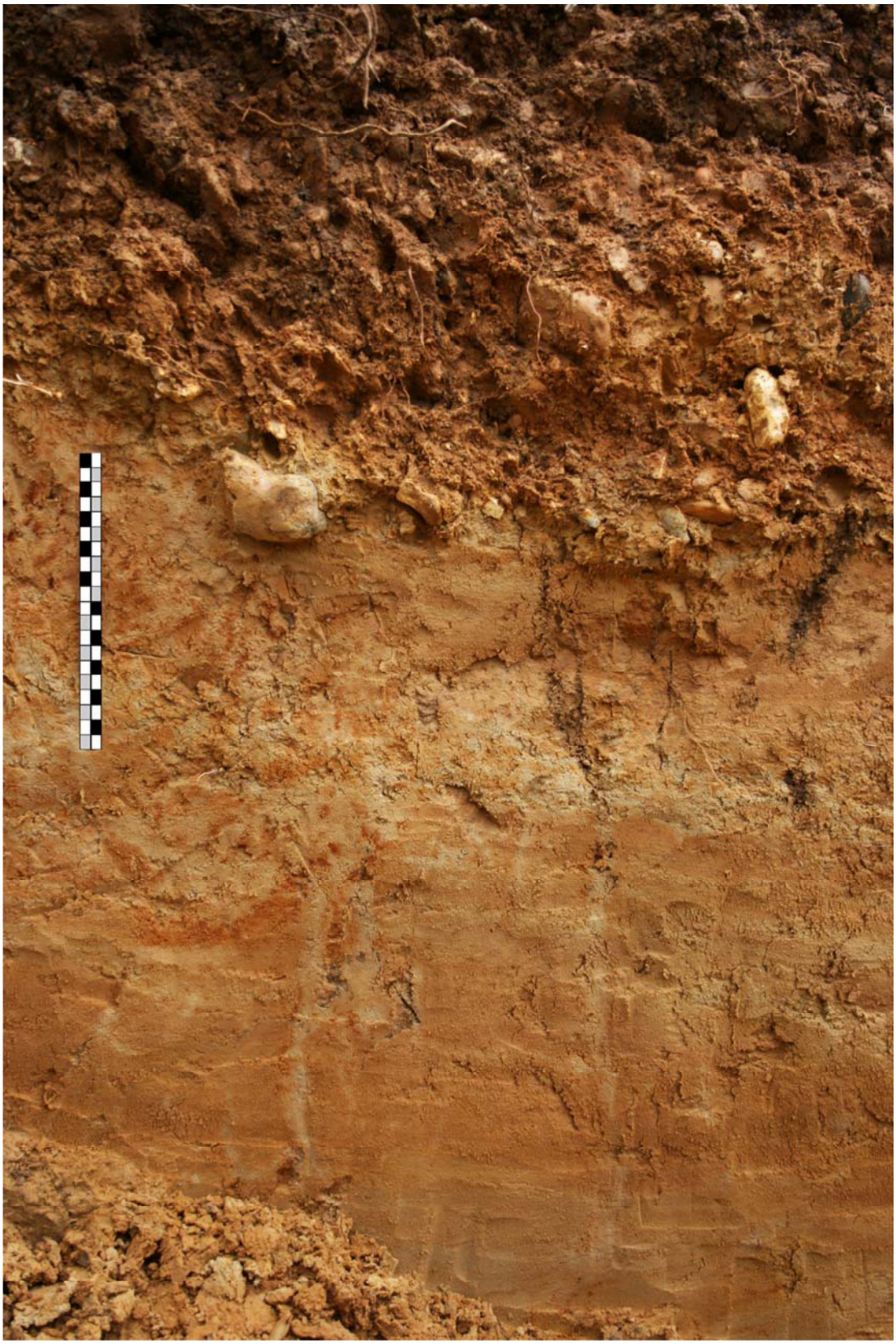
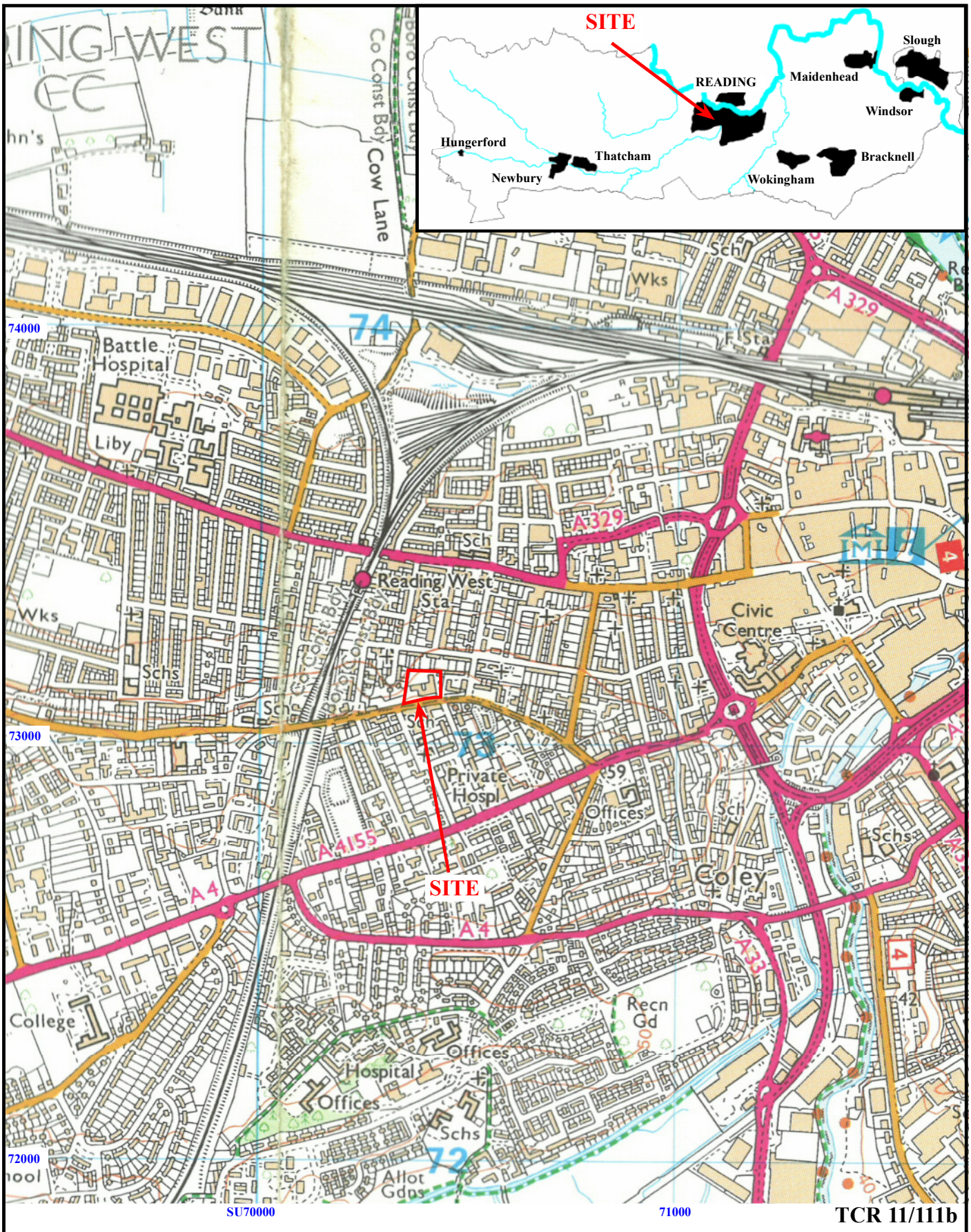


Figure 2

48 Tilehurst Road, Reading – Trial Trench 3 (observer looking east; 20 cm scale in cm units).

Figure 3

48 Tilehurst Road, Reading – Trial Trench 2 (observer looking south; 20 cm scale in cm units).



Taylor Court, 48 Tilehurst Road, Reading, Berkshire, 2012
Archaeological Evaluation

Figure 1. Location of site within Reading and Berkshire.

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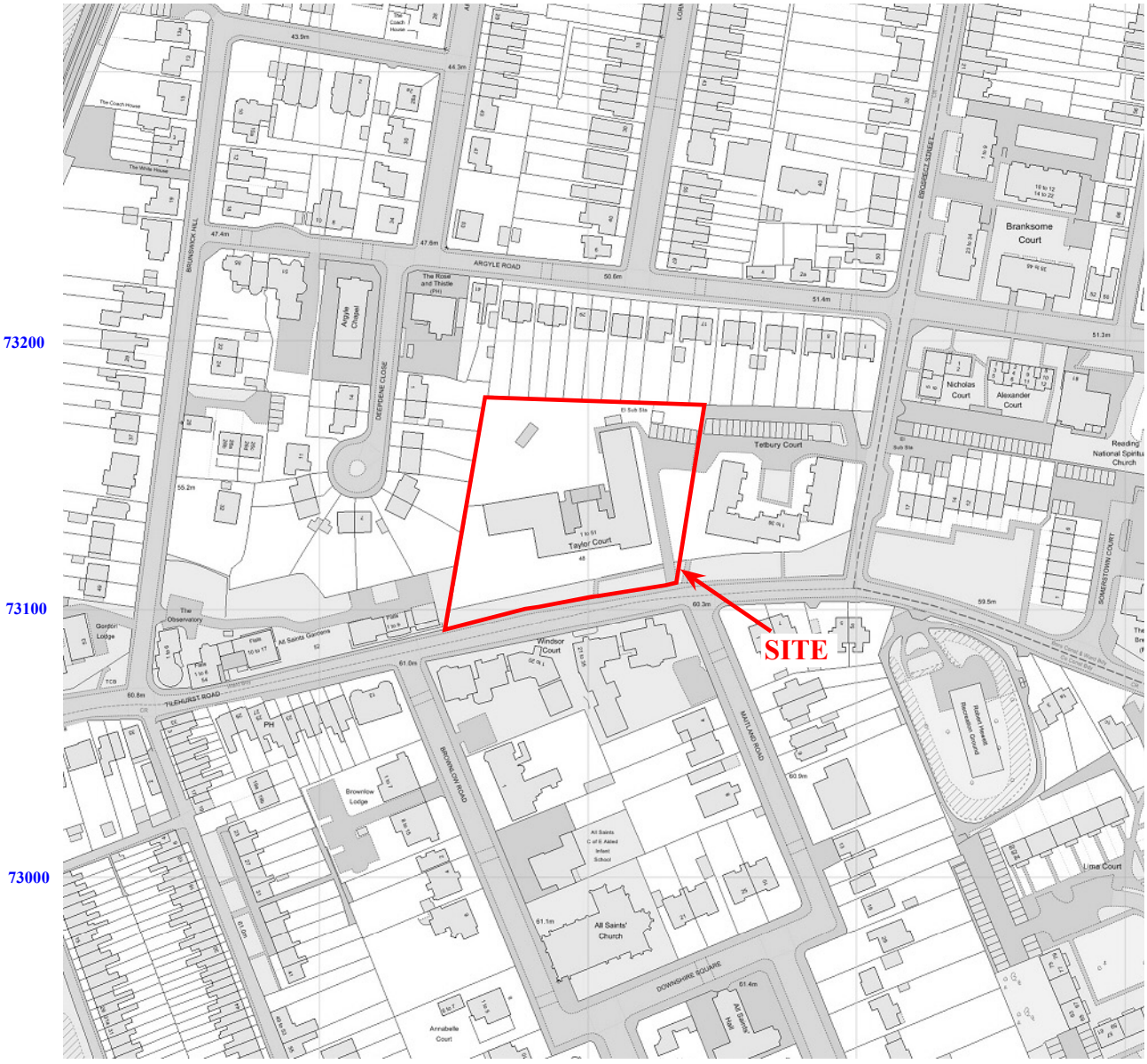

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Figure 2. Detailed location of site off Tilehurst Road.

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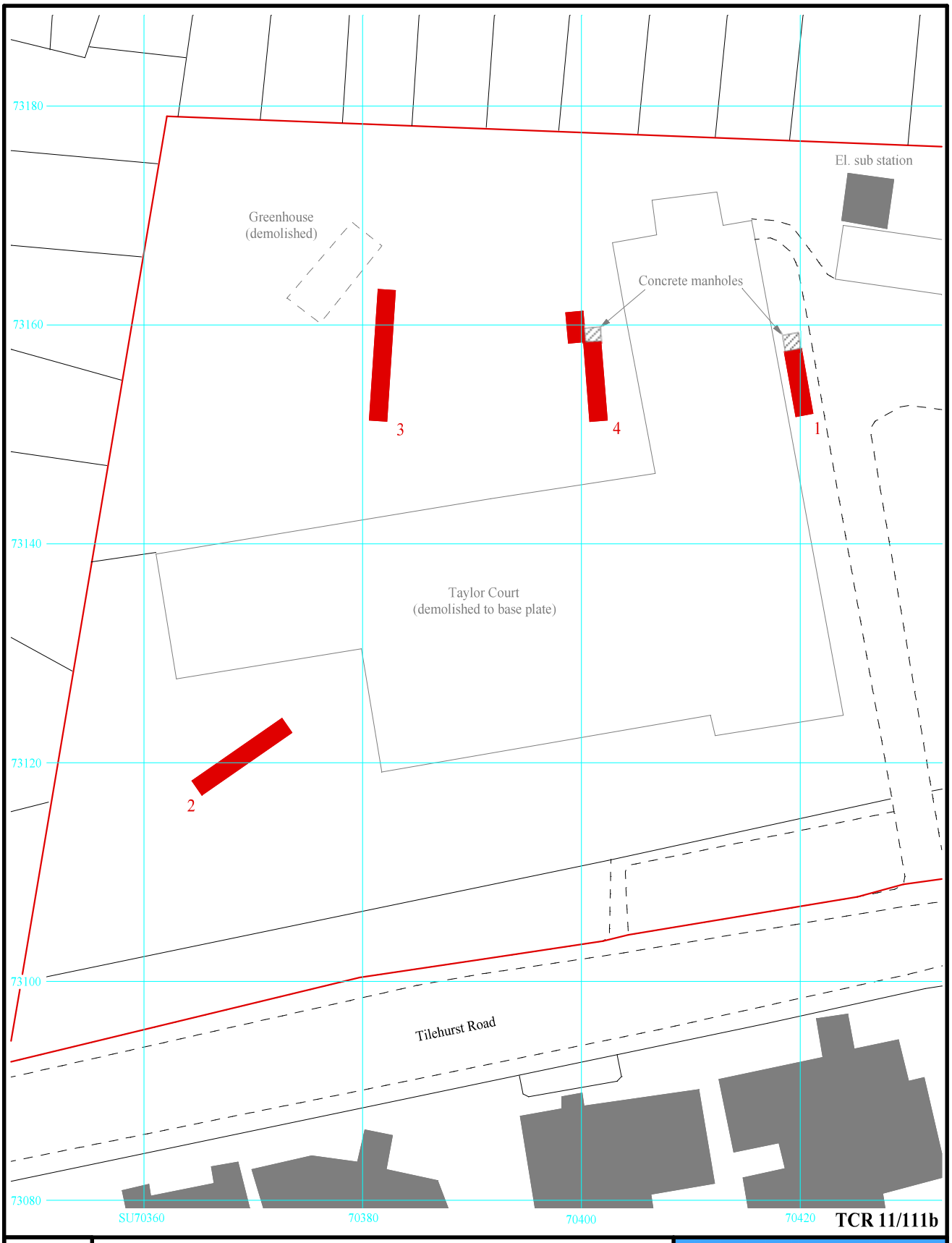

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Taylor Court, 48 Tilehurst Road, Reading, Berkshire, 2012
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Figure 3. Location of trenches.

0 25m

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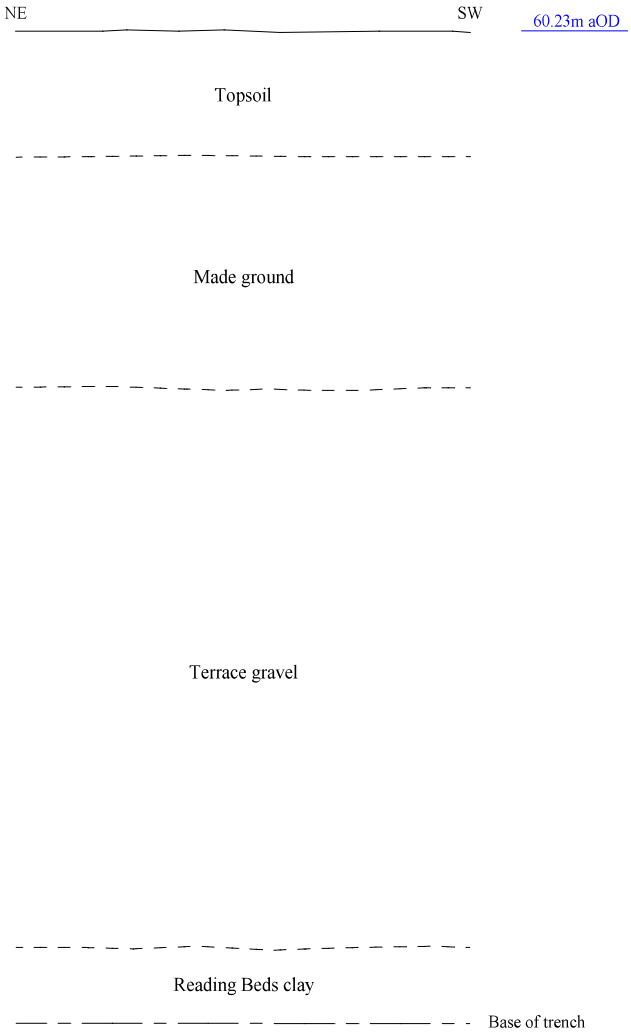

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Figure 4. Representative section from Trench 2.

0 1m

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Plate 1. Trench 2, looking southeast showing section through gravel. Scales: 2m and 0.5m.

Plate 2. Trench 3, looking north, Scales: 2m and 0.5m.

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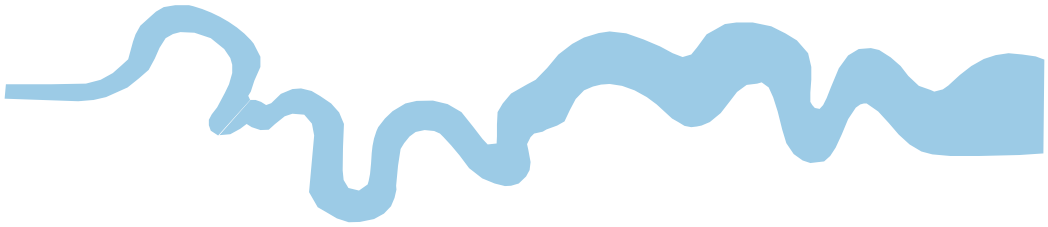
Taylor Court, 48 Tilehurst Road, Reading,
Berkshire, 2012
Archaeological Evaluation
Plates 1 and 2.

THAMES VALLEY
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SERVICES

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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