

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**Former GWR Sports Ground, Shrivenham Road,
Swindon, Wiltshire**

An archaeological recording action

By Andrew Mundin and Jo Pine

**GWR12/23
(SU 1648 8540)**

Former GWR Sports Ground, Shrivenham Road, Swindon, Wiltshire

An Archaeological Recording action

For David Wilson Homes (Southern)

by Andrew Mundin and Jo Pine
Thames Valley Archaeological Services
Ltd

Site Code GWR 12/23

May 2012

Summary

Site name: Former GWR Sports Ground, Shrivenham Road, Swindon, Wiltshire

Grid reference: SU 1648 8540

Site activity: Recording action

Date and duration of project: 24th April – 22nd May 2012

Project manager: Jo Pine

Site supervisor: Andrew Munding and Jo Pine

Site code: GWR 12/23

Area of site:, Area A =c.1265 sq m, Area B =1980 sq m; Area C=c.340 sq m

Summary of results: Three areas were stripped centred on features discovered in a previous evaluation trenching exercise at the site. A number of linear features were recorded certainly or probably of later post-medieval date including a possible droveway. A few sherds of Early Bronze Age pottery were recovered as stray or residual finds.

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

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Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford✓ 31.05.12 Steve Preston✓ 29.05.12
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Former GWR Sports Ground, Shrivenham Road, Swindon, Wiltshire An Archaeological Recording Action

by Andrew Munda and Jo Pine

with contributions by Steve Crabb, Ceri Falys, Danielle Milbank and Jane Timby

Report 12/23

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological recording action carried out at land at the former GWR Sports Ground, Shrivenham Road, Swindon, Wiltshire (SU 1648 8540) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Johnathan Headland of David Wilson Homes (Southern), Norgate House, Tealgate, Charnham Park, Hungerford, West Berkshire, RG17 0YT.

Planning permission (S/12/0044) has been gained from Swindon Borough Council to construct 226 houses and associated access and open areas on the former sports ground which totals an area of 5.6 hectares. This consent is conditional and subject to a requirement for an archaeological recording action to take place on targeted portions of the field. These targets have been created from information gained from a trial-trench evaluation exercise on the site, which identified parts of linear features in three areas (FA 2006).

This was 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 Melanie Pomeroy-Kellinger, County Archaeologist for Wiltshire Council Archaeological Service. The fieldwork was carried out by Steve Crabb, Andy Taylor, Andy Munda and Jo Pine

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

Location, topography and geology

The site is located within the urban area of Swindon, just to the north-east of the town centre and just off Ocotal Way (A313) and Shrivenham Road. The development site comprised the whole of the disused Great Western Railway Sports Ground (Fig. 2), covering 5.6ha. Any previously standing buildings on the site had been demolished, such as the main pavilion and the cricket pavilion. The base of the tennis courts at the south of the site and the bowling green were still present at the time of the investigation. The remainder of the ground is grassland and relatively flat at c.99 m above Ordnance Datum with only a gradual slope down towards the site

boundary and the culvert for the river Cole in the east. The underlying geology is Kimmeridge Clay (BGS 1971), and a light grey brown clay was noted at the base of parts of the excavation area whereas in other areas it was noted as blue grey reduced clay with fossilized shell, patches of light brown grey clay and very fine gravel/sand areas. Alluvial clayey silts were also noted in all the areas overlying the natural geology

Archaeological background

The archaeology of the claylands in the Swindon region is less well known than that of the gravel terraces of the Thames to the north, but Roman settlement, sometimes extensive, is recorded as at Lower Widhill Farm, Blunsden (Cass 2008; Lewis and Preston in prep). An Iron Age enclosure has also been excavated at Groundwell Farm, Blunsden St Andrew (Gingell 1982). The archaeological potential of the current site has been identified by a field evaluation (FA 2006) which comprised the excavation and recording of six trenches measuring a total of 340m by 2m, across the development area. Three archaeological features were present within the evaluated area. Two of these, in Trenches 3 and 5, were suggested to represent a single possible Roman linear feature extending the width of the study area. The third feature, in Trench 6, comprised a ditch aligned north-south, 0.61m wide and 0.12m deep. The feature was cut into the natural gravels and was sealed by the alluvium. A single sherd of Late Bronze Age pottery was recovered from this feature.

Part of the disused route of the Wilts and Berks canal flanks the southern part of the site. This was built in 1810 and abandoned in 1914.

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

Specific research objectives

The project seeks to answer the following specific questions:

- What is the nature and date of any landscape features (eg fields, boundary features, large enclosures) and what is their spatial organization?
- Are there any occupied areas within the proposal site?
- How do landscape features and occupied areas interact?

Three areas (A, B,C) totalling *c.* 3600 sq m were to be excavated, targeted on the findings in three of the previous evaluation trenches (FA 2006) (Fig. 2).

Topsoil, overburden and subsoil deposits were removed under continuous archaeological supervision by a 360° machine fitted with a toothless bucket. Water ingress was managed by the use of baulks and pumps. The archaeological deposits observed included shallow ditches and gullies and treeholes. All archaeological deposits were cleaned and excavated by hand. All features were half sectioned as a minimum. At least 20% of linear features were sampled and in the case of gully 1001 at least 75% was excavated.

Three bulk soil samples were taken for environmental evidence, from sealed contexts; however, no charred seeds or charcoal were identified. A full written, drawn and photographic record of the excavation was made. A catalogue of excavated features and contexts is to be found in Appendix 1.

Results

Area A (Fig. 3)

An area of *c.* 1265 sq m was stripped to expose the natural geology. A larger area had been proposed but this was reduced in the light of the scarcity of features: just a single gully (1001) was revealed. It was decided to reduce the area stripped after an additional evaluation trench (Tr Z) excavated on a NNW-SSE axis to the far south-west of the proposed area proved this area was empty of SSW-NNE aligned ditches or gullies such as might form an enclosure with gully 1001. A stretch of the previous evaluation trench (5) proved no linear features to the NE of the proposed area and new trench U, effectively extending trench 5 to the SE, showed this area of the site was truncated. This reduction in stripped area was agreed after consultation with the County Archaeologist.

The stratigraphy of the non-truncated open area and evaluation trenches was shown to be topsoil and/or clinker onto a reddish brown clayey silt (770) which was *c.* 0.30m deep. This overlay a light yellow brown clayey silt (762) *c.* 0.20m deep. This (alluvial?) deposit was removed to reveal, mostly in the northern half of the area, a thin layer of light reddish brown clay (763), 0.23m deep. This and deposit 762 in the southern part of the area sealed the natural geology, mostly a blue grey reduced clay (760) with fossilized shell, with to the SW, small areas of light brown grey clay with very small areas of sand intermittent within the blue grey clay.

Gully 1001 was recorded truncating deposit 762, this likely being the same as the gully 504 recorded in evaluation trench 5.

This gully was on a NW-SE axis and a *c.* 25 m stretch was exposed. It was shallow, being no more than a stain in its most northerly extent and intermittent in presence at its southern end. Six slots (705-710) were

excavated and then extended to excavate at least 75% of this gully, to show it was between 0.60m and 0.80m wide and up to 0.15m deep (Fig. 6; Pls 1 and 2). A single sherd of Beaker/early? Bronze Age pottery was recovered from its light greyish brown clayey silt fill in slot 705 (767). It is possible this is a southern continuation of a post-medieval ditch 1003 excavated to the north in Area C however gully 1001 contained no fired clay or clinker as did ditch 1003 in moderately high quantities.

A treehole 704 was also recorded sealed beneath reddish brown clay (763) and cutting the natural geology (Fig. 6).

Area B (Fig. 4; Pl. 4)

An area of c.1980 sq m was stripped to expose the natural geology, this area being dug in cells with baulks between them in order to facilitate water management. A 60m by 15m stretch to the south-east was not stripped as trial holes in that area showed extensive disturbance truncating the natural geology. The stratigraphy of the opened area was shown to be topsoil and/or clinker onto a subsoil layer (753), which consisted of a light brown clayey silt 0.30m deep. This overlay a light brown clay (754) 0.23m deep; this sealed the natural geology (755), a blue grey reduced clay with fossilized shell, patches of light brown grey clay and gravel/sand areas.

Sealed beneath the subsoil deposits cutting the natural geology was a low density of features. A gully 1000, which was a continuation of the linear (604) seen in evaluation trench (6) was recorded. The NNW terminal end (703) of the feature was exposed with a further 12.6m extending to the SSE. It was between 0.44–60m wide and 0.09–0.10m deep (Fig. 6; Pl. 3). Its light brown silty clay fill contained animal bone. A single sherd of late? Bronze Age pottery was recovered from the evaluation slot [604] (605) but no finds came from this investigation.

A further likely gully terminus (701) was recorded 12.8m to the west. This was only a small stretch, 2.23m long on a NE-SW axis, being 0.46m wide and 0.11m deep (Fig. 6). No finds were recovered from its reddish brown clay fill (756). A treehole 700 was also recorded (Fig. 6).

Area C (Fig. 5; Pl. 6)

A 340 sq m area was stripped to expose the archaeological features in the area; the continuation (1002) of the ditch 305 which was previously revealed in evaluation trench 3 and in addition ditch 1003 which was not observed in the evaluation trench. The stripped area was reduced from what was proposed after consultation with the County Archaeologist after it was seen both these ditches were post-medieval. Both ditches 1002 and 1003 truncated a mid yellow brown clayey silt alluvial? deposit (774). This material was shown; by excavating through this layer in three areas, to overlie the clay geology.

The stratigraphy of the opened area was thus shown to be topsoil with occasional clinker 0.20m deep onto a reddish brown clayey silt which was c.0.30m deep (775). This overlay a light yellow brown clayey silt (774) c. 0.50m deep which in turn sealed the natural geology; a yellow brown clay (781).

Ditch 1002 was on a NW-SE alignment and a c.25 m stretch of this ditch was revealed below layer 775 and truncating alluvial layer 774. Three slots (711, 712 and 715) were excavated to show it was between 0.80m and 0.90m wide and 0.09–0.19m deep (Figs 6 and 7; Pl. 5). A single sherd of residual Beaker? Bronze Age pottery was recovered from its light greyish brown clayey silt fill [711] (771) together with a coal fragment from [712] (772) and fired clay from [711] and [712].

Ditch 1003 was also on a NW-SE alignment; parallel to 1002 with a c.7m gap between these two ditches. It is possible they form a drove or trackway down to the river Cole or the Wilts and Berks canal. Within the open area a c.15 m stretch of ditch 1003 was plotted, truncating layer 774. Three additional trenches V, X and Y were excavated to indicate this ditch continued for at least another 40m to the south-east. Four slots (713 and 714 in the open area and 716 and 718 in the trenches) were excavated to show it was between 0.80m and 0.90m wide and 0.09–0.14m deep (Fig. 7). A small iron punch with a diamond shaped point on a square shaft was recovered from slot [714] (776) together with clinker debris created by a furnace used to fire a boiler, from [713] (773) and [718] (780). Coal was recovered from slot [714] (776) and a post-medieval brick fragment came from [717] (779).

Finds

Pottery by Jane Timby

The archaeological work resulted in the recovery of just two bodysherds of pottery weighing 8g. The sherds are catalogued below. Both are quite small and in worn condition but share the same fabric and are thus likely to be contemporary. Both sherds are from handmade vessels and have an oxidized surface and black core. The fabric is moderately soft and tempered with inclusions of sub-angular to rounded grog. The wall thickness is moderately thin at 5mm.

The character of the fabric and the firing suggest that provisionally these sherds could date to the Beaker/earlier Bronze Age. The wall thickness would not be out of place for Beaker vessels although neither sherd appears to be decorated. However, it should also be noted that the use of such tempering also features in the middle and later Bronze Ages in this area and that without corroborative evidence any dating must remain speculative.

Pottery Catalogue

1. Bodysherd. Grog-tempered. Weight 2 g. Area A Gully cut [705] (767).
2. Bodysherd. Grog-tempered. Weight 6 g. Area C Gully cut [711] (771).

Animal Bone by Ceri Falys

Seven small fragments of animal bone were recovered from a single context (757) within the excavated area, weighing just 14g. The preservation of the remains was generally good, with small fragment size and limited cortical exfoliation on two of the pieces. Five of the pieces were refitted into a long bone shaft fragment of a medium-sized animal. No further information could be retrieved from these fragments of animal bone.

Metalwork and industrial debris by Steven Crabb

A single ferrous object was recovered from this site, from ditch 1003 [714](776). It is a small punch with a diamond shaped point on a square shaft. The head has been repeatedly stuck with force to round the edges over. It measures 43mm long, the head measures 15mm across, the shaft measures 10.28mm across and the point is 13mm across at the widest.

Four fragments of industrial debris were recovered from this site, two were clinker characteristic of the debris created by a furnace used to fire a boiler, they were recovered from [713] (773) and [718](780). The other pieces recovered were coal from 1002 [712](772) and 1003 [714](776). These are likely derived from the use of steam powered agricultural equipment in the later post-medieval period.

Ceramic Building Materials by Danielle Milbank

A single fragment of brick was recovered from the excavation. This weighed 75g and was recovered from ditch 1003 slot [717](779). The fabric is a very hard sandy fabric with poorly-sorted angular and subangular inclusions, and with manganese and ferrous inclusions present. The intact side has striations indicating a wire cut. The brick can be broadly classified as Harley type 4.4 to 4.9 (Harley 1974) and is of likely post-medieval date; its slightly uneven 'folded' texture suggests the earlier part of this range.

Fired Clay by Danielle Milbank

Fired clay weighing 28g (17 fragments) was recovered from the excavations, from both ditches 1002 and 1003 in Area C (Appendix 2). They were examined under x10 magnification. Typically, the fabric was slightly soft, evenly-fired fine clay with occasional sandy inclusions. The colour was generally orange red, though examples of darker red hue were observed. No daub fragments with impressions of the wooden wattles were identified.

The majority of the fired clay was in the form of very small fragments which could not be identified; however it is possible that some of the material represents very fragmented brick or tile.

Conclusion

The excavations uncovered a modest amount of archaeological features in the form of ditches and gullies. Three sherds of well worn Bronze Age pottery were recovered from three of these 1000, 1001 and 1002. It seems most unlikely these linear features date to this period on the basis that non-funerary earlier Bronze Age cut features remains are very rarely encountered. The Bronze Age pottery points to a little activity in the area for this period.

Post-medieval activity was recorded on site; two parallel ditches 1002 and 1003 with a 7m gap between them. It is possible they form a drove or trackway down to the river Cole and or the disused Wilts and Berks Canal. It is possible that linear 1001 in Area A represents a southern continuation of this routeway. A cartographic study (maps of North Wilts Herald Office dated 1849, War Office map of 1948 and Borough of Swindon Expansion map of 1957) did not show these features suggesting that they may pre-date the 19th century.

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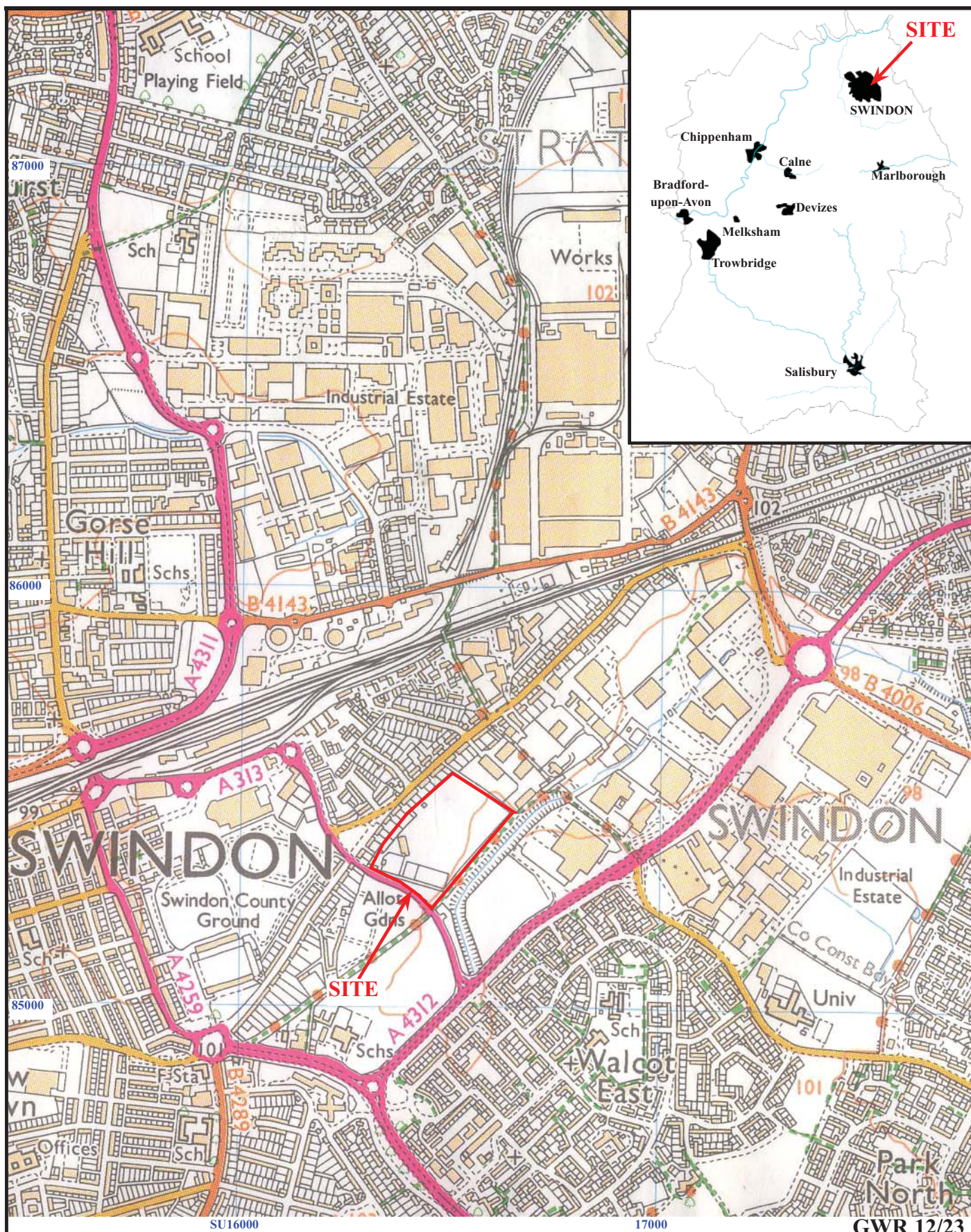
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APPENDIX 1: Feature Details

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>Group</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating Evidence</i>
700	750		Treehole	B		
	751		Topsoil	B		
	752		Clinker Layer	B		
	753		Subsoil-clay silt	B		
	754		Subsoil-clay	B		
	755		Natural	B		
701	756		Linear terminus	B	?	
702	757	1000	Linear terminus	B	?	
703	758	1000	Linear terminus	B	?	
704	759		Treehole	A		
	760		Natural	A		
	761		Topsoil	A		
	762		Layer	A		
	763		Layer	A		
707	764	1001	Gully	A	Post-medieval?	Landscape
708	765	1001	Gully	A	Post-medieval?	Landscape
709	766	1001	Gully	A	Post-medieval?	Landscape
705	767	1001	Gully	A	Post-medieval?	Landscape
706	768	1001	Gully	A	Post-medieval?	Landscape
710	769	1001	Gully	A	Post-medieval?	Landscape
	770		Deposit	A		
711	771	1002	Ditch	C	Post-medieval	Coal and landscape
712	772	1002	Ditch	C	Post-medieval	Coal and landscape
713	773	1003	Ditch	C	Post-medieval	Brick and clinker
	774		Deposit	C		
	775		Deposit	C		
714	776	1003	Ditch	C	Post-medieval	Brick and clinker
715	777	1002	Ditch	C	Post-medieval	Coal and landscape
716	778	1003	Ditch	C	Post-medieval	Brick and clinker
717	779	1003	Ditch	C	Post-medieval	Brick and clinker
718	780	1003	Ditch	C	Post-medieval	Brick and clinker
	781		Natural	C		

APPENDIX 2: Catalogue of Fired Clay

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>Group</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt (g)</i>
711	771	1002	Ditch	C	2	6
712	772	1002	Ditch	C	11	10
714	776	1003	Ditch	C	2	4
718	780	1003	Ditch	C	2	8



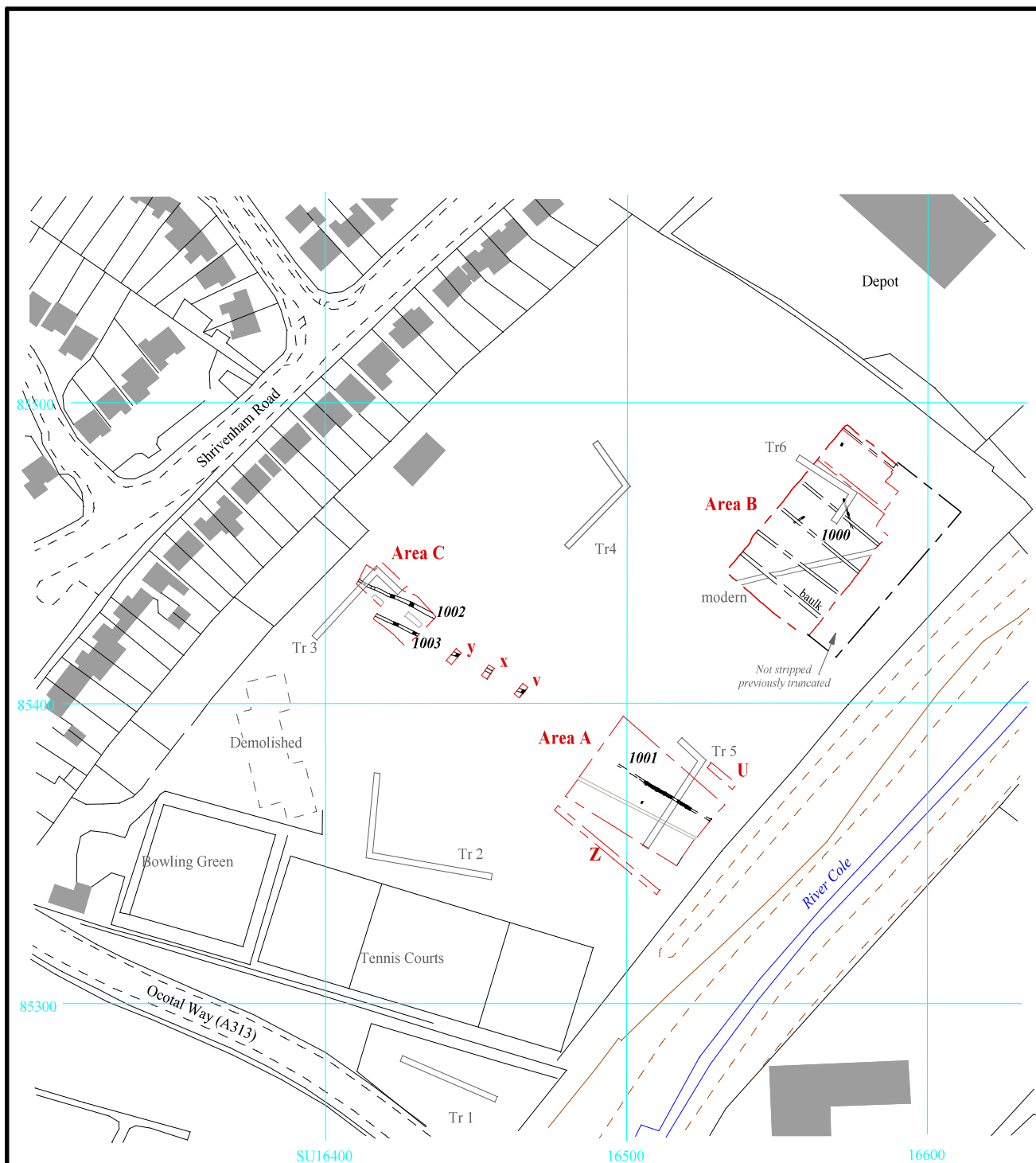
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Figure 1. Location of site within Swindon and Wiltshire.

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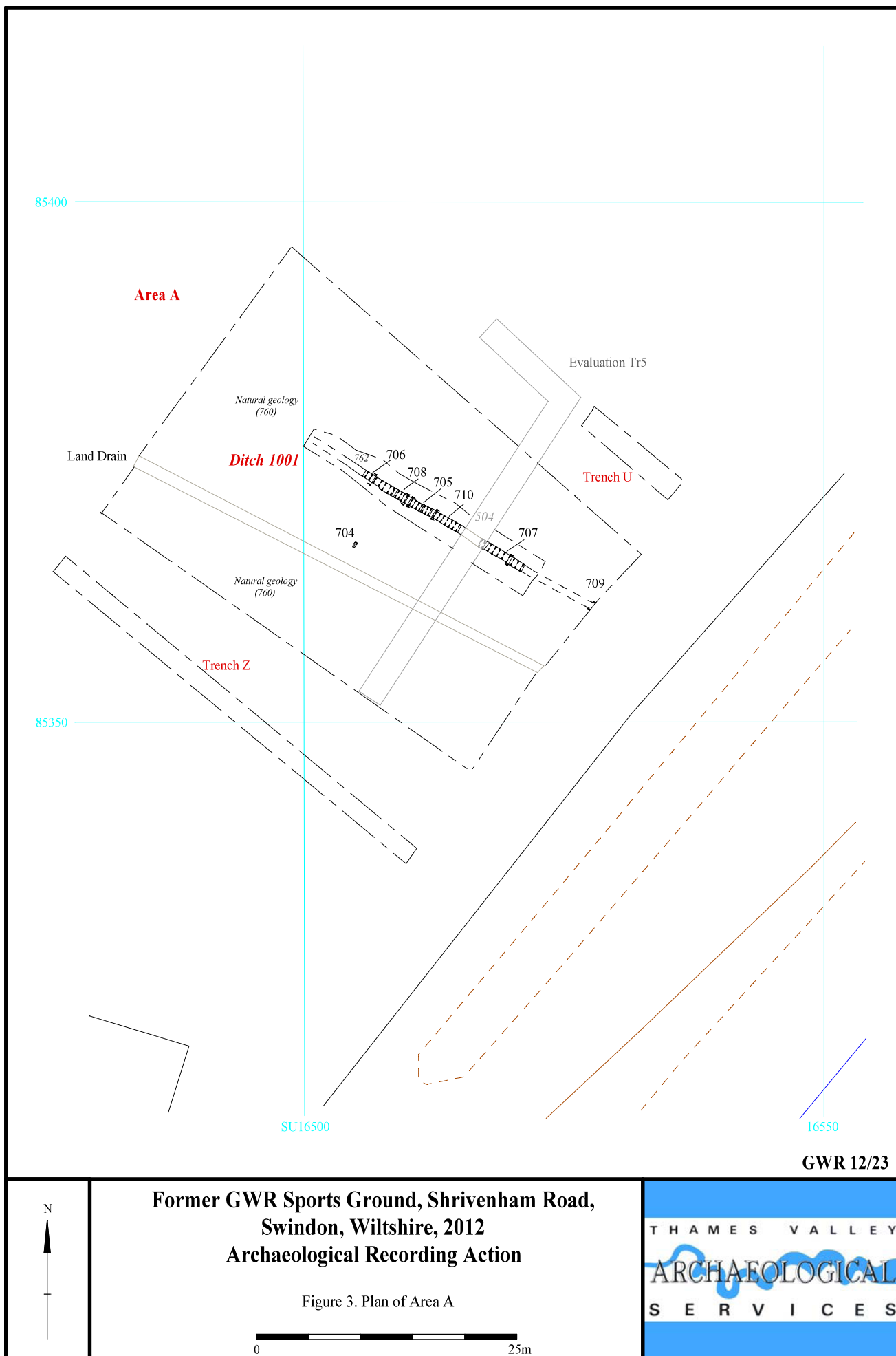
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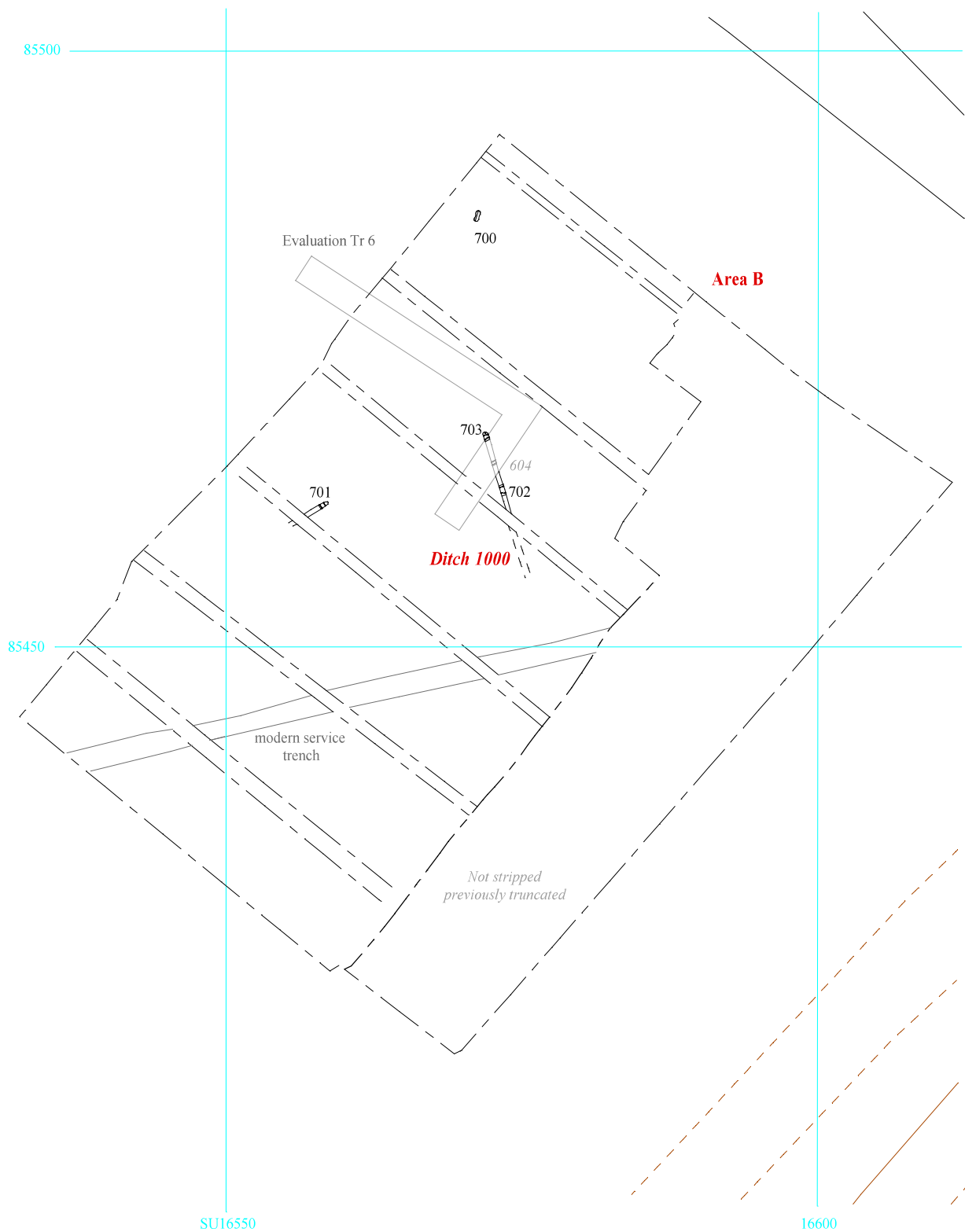
Figure 2. Location of Excavation areas and previous evaluation trenches.

0 100m



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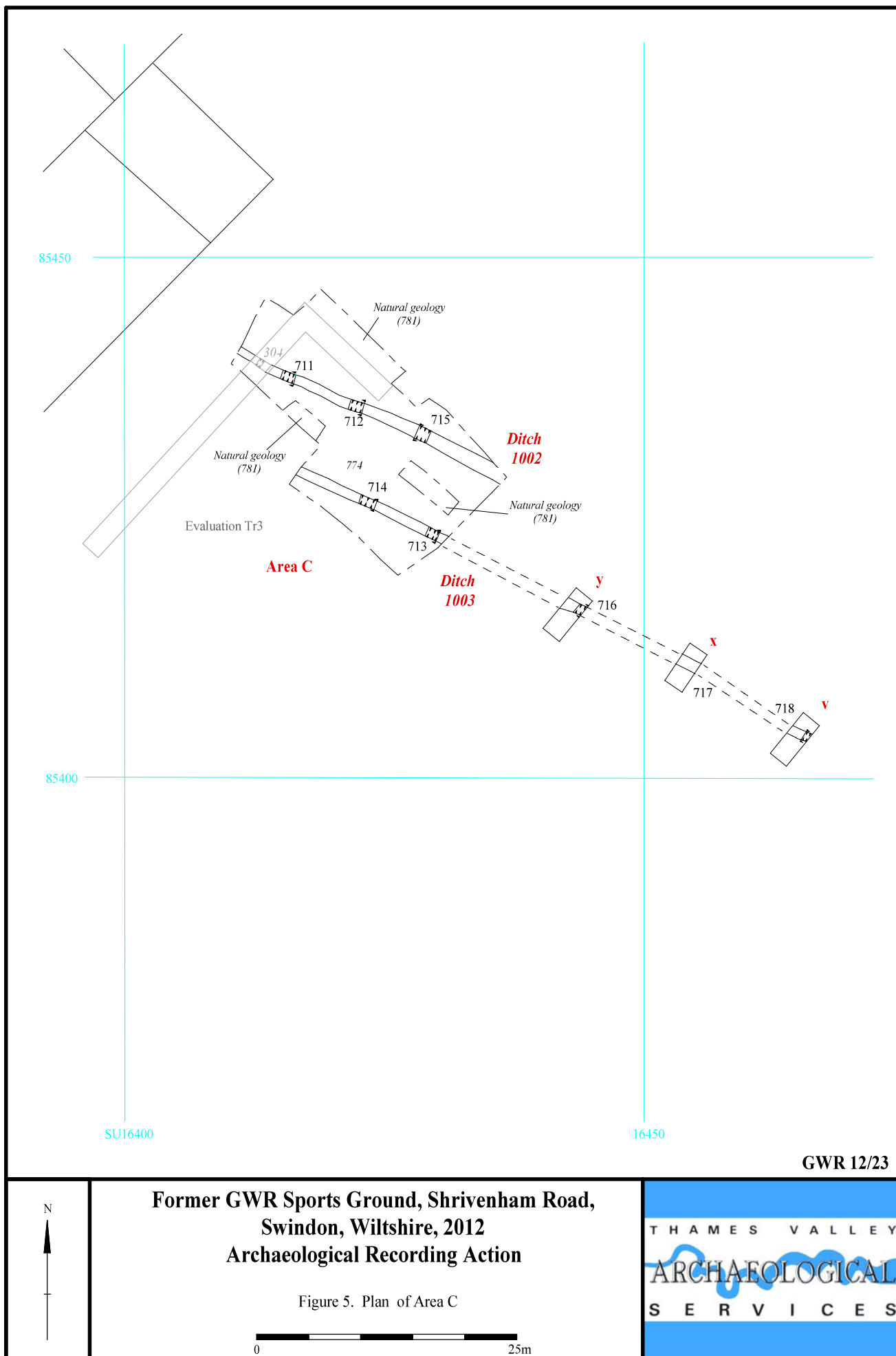


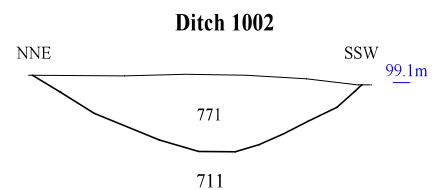
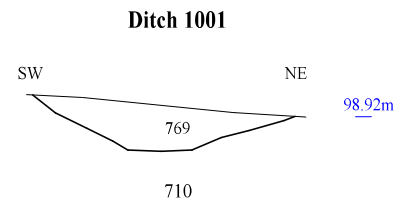
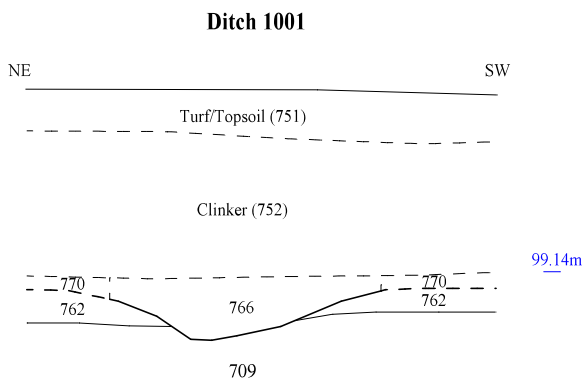
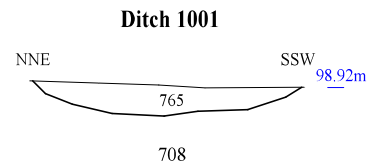
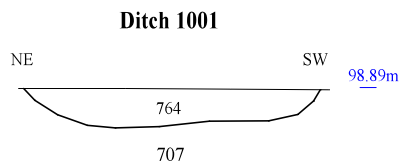
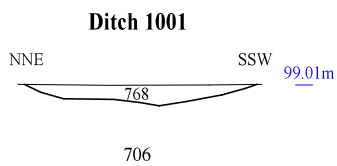
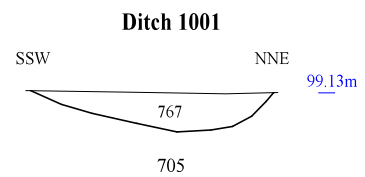
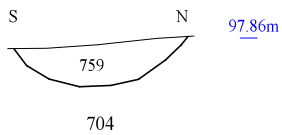
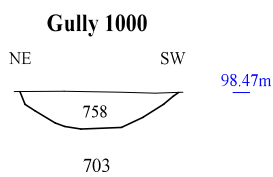
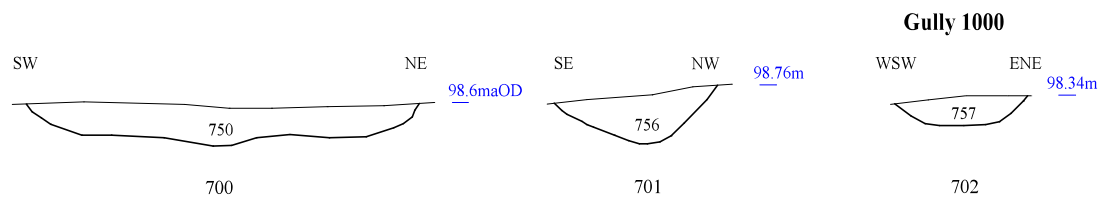
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Figure 4. Plan of Area B



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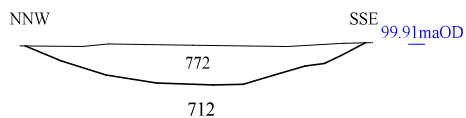
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Figure 6. Sections.

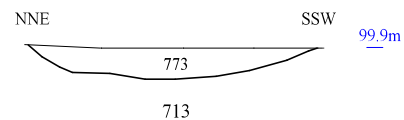


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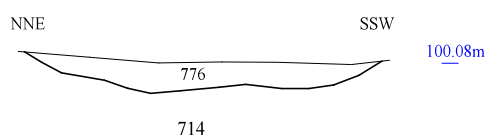
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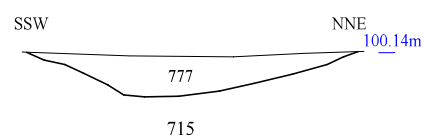
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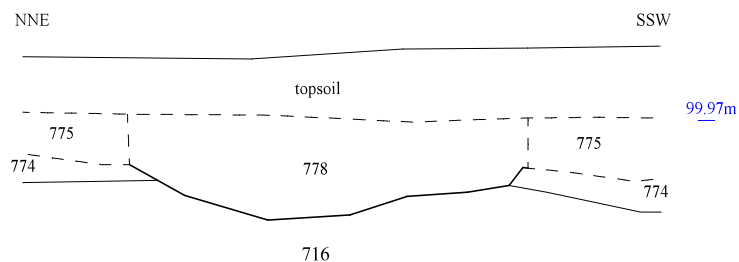
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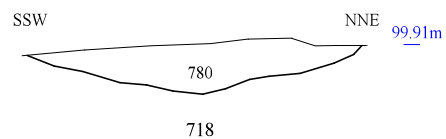
Ditch 1002



Ditch 1003



Ditch 1003



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Figure 7. Sections.



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Plate 1. Area A, ditch 1001, looking northwest. Scales: 1m and 0.5m.



Plate 2. Area A, ditch 1001 (cut 708), looking southeast. Scales: 1m, 0.5m and 0.1m.

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Plates 1 and 2.

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Plate 3. Gully 702, looking east. Scales: 0.5m and 0.1m.



Plate 4. Area B, looking west.

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Plates 3 and 4.

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Plate 5. Area C, driveway 1002 (cut 712), looking east. Scales: 1m and 0.1m.



Plate 6. Area C, looking northwest. Scale: 1m.

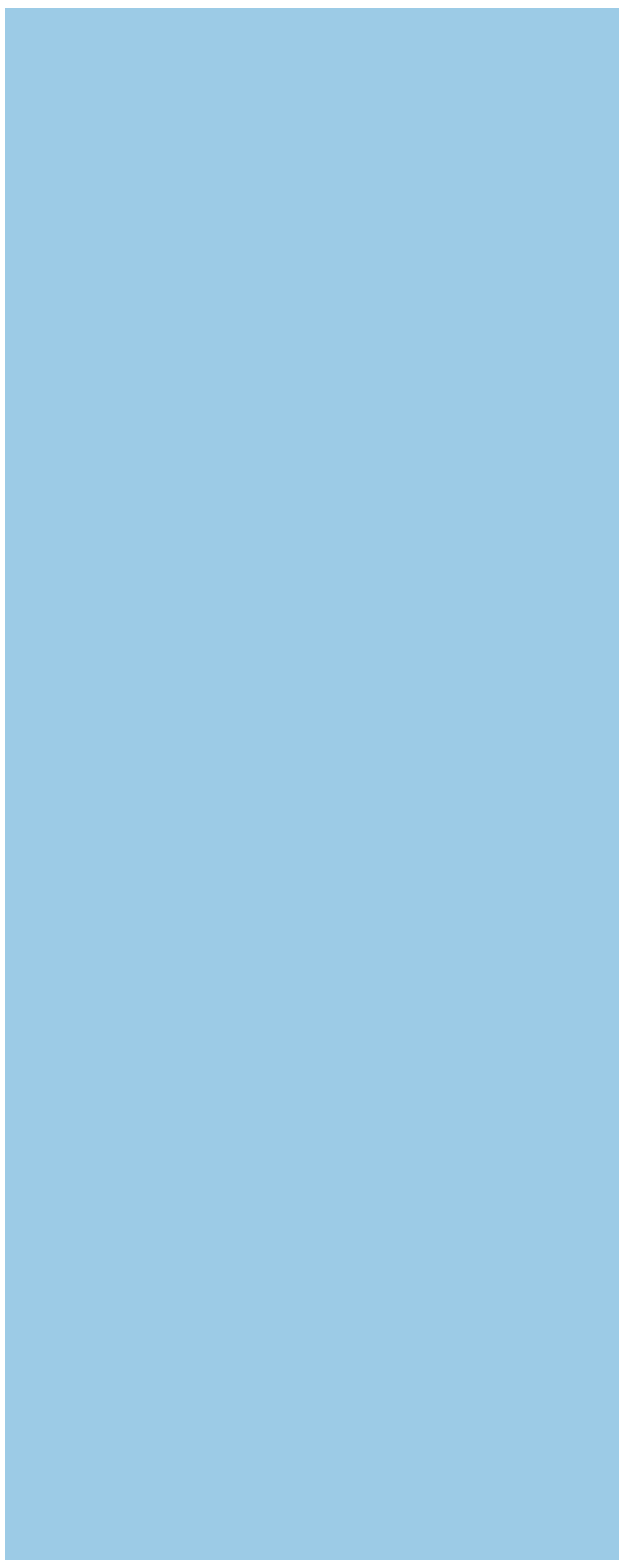
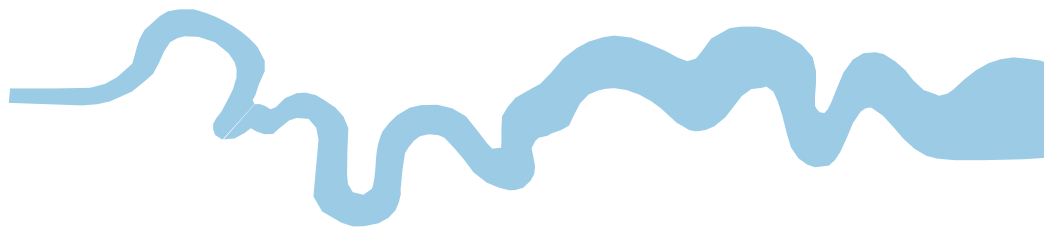
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Plates 5 and 6.

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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
↓	↓



**Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd,
47-49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading,
Berkshire, RG1 5NR**

**Tel: 0118 9260552
Fax: 0118 9260553
Email: tvas@tvas.co.uk
Web: www.tvas.co.uk**