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S E R V I C E S

**Friar Street road repair,  
Reading, Berkshire**

**Archaeological Watching Brief**

**by Danielle Milbank and Andy Taylor**

**Site Code:FSR13/42**

**(SU 7160 7360)**

# **Friar Street Road Repair, Reading, Berkshire**

**An Archaeological Watching Brief**

**For Reading Borough Council**

by Danielle Milbank and Andy Taylor

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code FSR 13/42

**March 2013**

## Summary

**Site name:** Friar Street Road Repair, Reading, Berkshire

**Grid reference:** SU 7150 7359

**Site activity:** Watching Brief

**Date and duration of project:** 19th–20th February 2013

**Project manager:** Steve Ford

**Site supervisor:** Danielle Milbank and Andy Taylor

**Site code:** FSR 13/42

**Area of site:** c.140 sq m

**Summary of results:** Layers of medieval deposits

**Monuments identified:** Layers of medieval material of 14th- to 15th-century date, including leather shoe parts and offcuts indicating production nearby.

**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 with accession number 2013:281.

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[www.tvas.co.uk/reports/reports.asp](http://www.tvas.co.uk/reports/reports.asp).*

Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford✓ 18.03.13 Steve Preston✓ 18.03.13
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# **Friar Street Road Repair, Reading, Berkshire An Archaeological Watching Brief**

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**Report 13/42**

## **Introduction**

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at Friar Street, Reading, Berkshire (SU 7150 7359) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Jane Hicks of Reading Borough Council, Civic Centre, Castle Street, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 7AE during emergency repairs to a collapsed sewer.

The field investigation was undertaken at the request of Ms Fiona MacDonald, Principal Archaeologist with Berkshire Archaeology, advisers to the Borough on matters relating to archaeology. The fieldwork was undertaken by Danielle Milbank and Andy Taylor on 19th–20th February 2013, and the site code is FSR13/42.

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 in the centre of Friar Street, in the middle of the road, next to the junction with Station Road and Queen Victoria Street in central Reading (Figs 1 and 2). The underlying geology comprises Valley Gravel (BGS 1948), which locally is expected to have a thin brickearth cap, although this was never exposed in this trench. The site lies at a height of *c.*45m above Ordnance Datum.

## **Archaeological background**

The archaeological potential of the site stems from its location within the historic core of Reading on what is thought to be one of the original medieval streets (Astill 1978). Friar Street was formerly known as New Street and was re-aligned on a new axis when the Franciscan Friary, at the western end of the street, and the Cluniac Abbey to the east were both constructed in the 12th and 13th centuries (Preston 2005). The town itself has late Saxon origins with the original Saxon town thought to be located somewhere close to St Mary's Church, which lies to the south-west. However, few deposits of Saxon date have yet been revealed within the town. Medieval deposits have also been identified during excavations carried out at either end of Friar Street (Atherton 1999; Preston 2005).



## Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the works, which involves the examination of areas of intrusive groundworks. Appendix 1 details the deposits encountered.

## Results

The trench observed measured 13m in length, 4.20m wide and c.1.40m deep (Pls 1 and 2). It consisted of 0.10m of Tarmac overlying 0.15m of concrete. This overlay 0.44m of mid grey flinty gravel made ground (50) overlying 0.24m of mid grey gravelly clay (51). This overlay 0.20m of a dark grey silty deposit (52) containing material pressed in from the above layer but may in fact be part of the layer below (60). Three (1–3) areas of truncation were evident in the trench aligned east-west. All of these were Victorian or modern, with cuts 2 and 3 containing cast iron pipes. Cut 1 may be associated with pipe 2, although this was unclear. Within layer 60 was another deposit of dark grey flinty silt (59), which may represent another dump layer.

A slot was dug into layer 60 to show the relationship between it and cut 1. This was a dark grey brown silty clay layer with frequent pieces of flint and measured 0.27m deep. It contained 13 sherds of 13th- to 14th-century pottery, 70 pieces of animal bone, 22 pieces of roof tile and 68 pieces of leather, mostly comprising shoe soles. Below this layer a further three layers were also visible (53–55), although these were not investigated further due to the trench having reached its optimum depth for the repairs. Layer 53 was a very pale brown clay fill and may in fact be associated with the truncation of cut 1. Layer 54 was mid grey brown gravelly, flinty silt and layer 55 was a mid grey brown gravelly silt.

## Finds

### *Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn*

The pottery assemblage comprised 13 sherds with a total weight of 167g. It was all medieval, and only one fabric type was present.

**SUR: Surrey Whiteware**, mid 13th–mid 15th century (Pearce and Vince 1988). A range of whitewares from several sources in Surrey, including ‘Coarse Border Ware’, Kingston and Cheam. Range of vessel forms which changes over time, but the earlier assemblages are dominated by glazed jugs, some with slipped, incised and plastic decoration. 5 sherds, 168g.

Most of the sherds are of the ‘Coarse Border Ware’ type (Pearce and Vince 1988, 52), a common find in the town (cf. Blinkhorn 2007, 13). The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Appendix 2.

The assemblage is all in good condition and appears reliably stratified, with some refitting sherds present. It comprised mainly glazed and unglazed bodysherds, but a decorated strap handle occurred in the dark fill of context 60, and a rimsherd from a jar was also glazed. The handle, with its broad and with incised decoration, is typical of those found on Coarse Border Ware type jugs and cisterns of the mid 14th–mid 15th century (Blinkhorn 2007, Fig. 44). The rimsherd is from a jar, and has a bifid profile and glaze on the outer surface. These ‘type 2’ Coarse Border Ware jars were mainly made from the later 14th–mid 15th century.

### *Animal Bone* by Ceri Falys

A small assemblage of animal bone was recovered from three contexts. A total of 70 fragments of bone were present for analysis, weighing 4984g (Appendix 3). The surface preservation of the remains was generally good, although a moderate amount of fragmentation was noted and occasional places of cortical exfoliation.

Initial analyses roughly sorted elements into categories based on size, not by species, into one of three categories: “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 was made. The determination of the minimum number of individuals (MNI) both within and between the species was investigated based on the duplication of elements, and differences in age categories.

A minimum of seven animals were present within the assemblage, all identified within deposit 60: four large, two medium and one small sized animal. The large animals were all identified as cattle, with the minimum number of four individuals identified through the presence of numerous metapodials. A total of three left and one right metatarsals were present, however, differing sizes and stages of skeletal development (i.e. adult and juvenile skeletons), suggesting multiple individuals. The two medium sized animals were identified as a sheep/goat and a deer. The sheep/goat sized individual was identified by portions of long bones, and the deer (likely roe deer), though the presence of a portion of antler. Finally, a single, unidentifiable small sized animal was represented by a humerus.

Many bones (primarily cattle) displayed evidence of butchery practices, with long bone shafts, ribs and vertebrae displaying numerous cut marks. No further information could be retrieved from these remains.

### *Ceramic Building Material* by Danielle Milbank

In total, brick and tile 22 fragments weighing 2270g were recovered from a single context (60), the majority of which were tile fragments.

The typical fabric is a hard, evenly fired clay, with small sandy and occasional larger rounded or sub-rounded quartz inclusions. Two examples have more frequent, larger inclusions, with some subangular flint. The colour ranges from mid orange red to a darker red, and there are several examples with a dark core, indicating reducing conditions during firing. Two fragments have a small amount of splashed greenish glaze.

The form of all the tile fragments is fairly uneven, with some edge-thickening. Two fragments have peg holes (one has both holes present) however the plain pieces are also likely to be peg tiles. The typical thickness is 14mm, with little variation either side of this. This type of tile was produced from the early medieval period onwards, and is not closely dateable, however the uneven form and finish of these pieces suggests that they date broadly to the medieval period.

### *Leather shoes* by Danielle Milbank

A total of 68 pieces of leather were recovered during the watching brief (Pl. 3). Of these, deposit 60 contained 65 pieces and the remaining pieces were recovered from the spoilheap. They were cleaned and categorized according to type of piece: soles, or partial soles; shaped upper parts (vamps); thin strips (straps, rands or welts); and unidentified pieces (irregular or ragged pieces). These are summarized in Appendix 5. The overall condition was very good, with the pieces fairly soft and not brittle, though some were slightly fragile. The thickness of the leather was typically 2mm, though several slightly thicker (3mm) fragments were present.

#### Soles

The sole pieces (15 in total) all have the same form and shape, with a rounded seat, narrow waist and wide tread, and pointed toe. The length of the complete soles ranged from 185mm to 262mm, with a typical example 255mm long, 55mm wide at the seat, 41mm wide at the waist, and 80mm wide at the widest part of the tread. The shape closely resembles shoe soles classified by Mould *et al.* (2003) as E1 and E2. Only one sole had stitch holes present, which were small and square, along the side of one piece.

#### Upper parts ('vamps')

A total of seven pieces were recovered which were identified as vamp pieces (upper shoe parts), which have been formed with neatly cut edges, most often with some straight and some curved edges. However, these were often found folded, and in order not to cause damage were not unfolded to be laid flat. Of these, three have

stitching along one or more sides which pierces one side of the leather only. Four further pieces had stitching along one or more sides where the leather was pierced all the way through. A single example of a circular (3mm diameter) lace hole was identified.

One example has a thin triangular dart c.50mm long, which projects from the main part (c.200mm x 160mm) and is cut from the same piece. A second example had a similar triangular dart which comprised a separate piece threaded through a slot in the main piece of leather, with a wider part at the end of the dart to keep it in place. These parts are likely to represent 'latchet' straps.

#### Straps and Rands

Also recovered from this context were 18 thin pieces. Of these, two were identified as 'latchet' type straps due to their thin triangular shape, and one has two slots at the wider end. Rands were identified as thin strips (typically 5mm wide), the majority (10 out of 13) of which have a single row of stitches that most closely resemble tunnel stitches. These were thin strips of leather added between the sole and the vamp (upper part) to add reinforcement to the seam.

#### Other pieces

The remaining pieces were fragments which did not appear to be neatly shaped, were ragged or had separated into two layers. Noted among these pieces was a small piece with two straight and one curved side, which closely matched the shape of the tread of the soles recovered from the same deposit. This appears to be an offcut formed when a sole was cut out of a blank piece of leather.

#### Summary

Overall, the shoe assemblage suggests the product of shoemaking and leatherworking on or near the site, with the number of pieces without stitching indicating cobbling waste rather than simple domestic refuse. Also, two pieces were recovered which were identified as offcuts (secondary waste), characteristic triangular shapes formed when cutting out a sole from a piece of leather. Several of the pieces may represent 'clump soles', partial soles added to repair an area of wear on a shoe. The lack of variation in the shape of the soles might suggest that they were made and deposited during a fairly short time period. However, this is not certain as a local typology has not been established and it is possible that the same form was repeated for a long period.

It is possible to identify the broad category of shoe being produced by the forms of the leather pieces. The thin triangular-shaped straps are 'latchets', which are threaded through two slots on a strap fixed to the other side and tied together to fasten the shoe at the front. Similar shoes from excavations at 16-22 Coppergate in York

were identified (Mould *et al.* 2003, 333) and described as style 11a ('front latchet-fastening shoes'). This form of shoe is thought to have been popular throughout Europe in the late 14th and early 15th century.

### *Metalwork* by Andy Taylor

Three iron nails were recovered, one from made ground and two from deposit 60. All were handmade and can only be given a broad date of medieval or post-medieval.

## **Conclusion**

The watching brief identified *in-situ* deposits of 14th-15th century date in an area that was previously thought not only to be in a road way but also a zone likely to have been extensively truncated away by modern services. It demonstrates our imperfect knowledge of the topography of medieval Reading. It has always been assumed that the current layout of Friar Street with respect to the positions of the shop frontages has been static for many centuries. Coate's map of 1802 (Fig. 5, upper) shows a wide Friar Street and this layout has been projected back into the medieval period for which no contemporary maps exist. However, the evidence observed here may tentatively suggest that the road was previously much narrower and perhaps also had a different centreline than the present day. That the locations of even main roads and streets within Saxon and medieval towns can drift despite remaining in continuous use has been demonstrated elsewhere, such as at Cornmarket in Oxford (Sturdy and Munby 1985) or Castle Street in Wallingford (Hammond and Preston 2012). However, before this suggestion is given more credence it should be noted that Speed's map of 1611 (Fig. 5 lower) shows buildings jutting out into the street in the vicinity of the site and it is possible the deposits recorded here reflect the presence of a similar structure. Finally, it is assumed that the dump deposits recorded here which notably contained a volume of shoes suggest the former presence of a cobblers nearby.

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## **APPENDIX 1: Catalogue of Excavated Features**

<b>Cut</b>	<b>Deposit</b>	<b>Type</b>
	50	Made Ground
	51	Made Ground
	52	Made Ground
	53	Layer Below 58
	54	Layer Below 58
	55	Layer Below 60
1	56	Pipe Cut
2	57	Pipe Cut
3	58	Pipe Cut
	59	Flint Spread
	60	Layer

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

<b>Fabric</b>	<b>SUR</b>	
<i>Context</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>
60	12	132
62	1	35
Total	13	167

**APPENDIX 3:** Catalogue of Animal Bone

<i>Deposit</i>	<i>No. frags</i>	<i>Wt (g)</i>	<i>Large</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Small</i>
60	52	3940	34 (cow)	17 (sheep/goat, deer)	1
62	1	40	1	-	-
Spoil	17	17	1004	16	1
Total	70	70	4984		



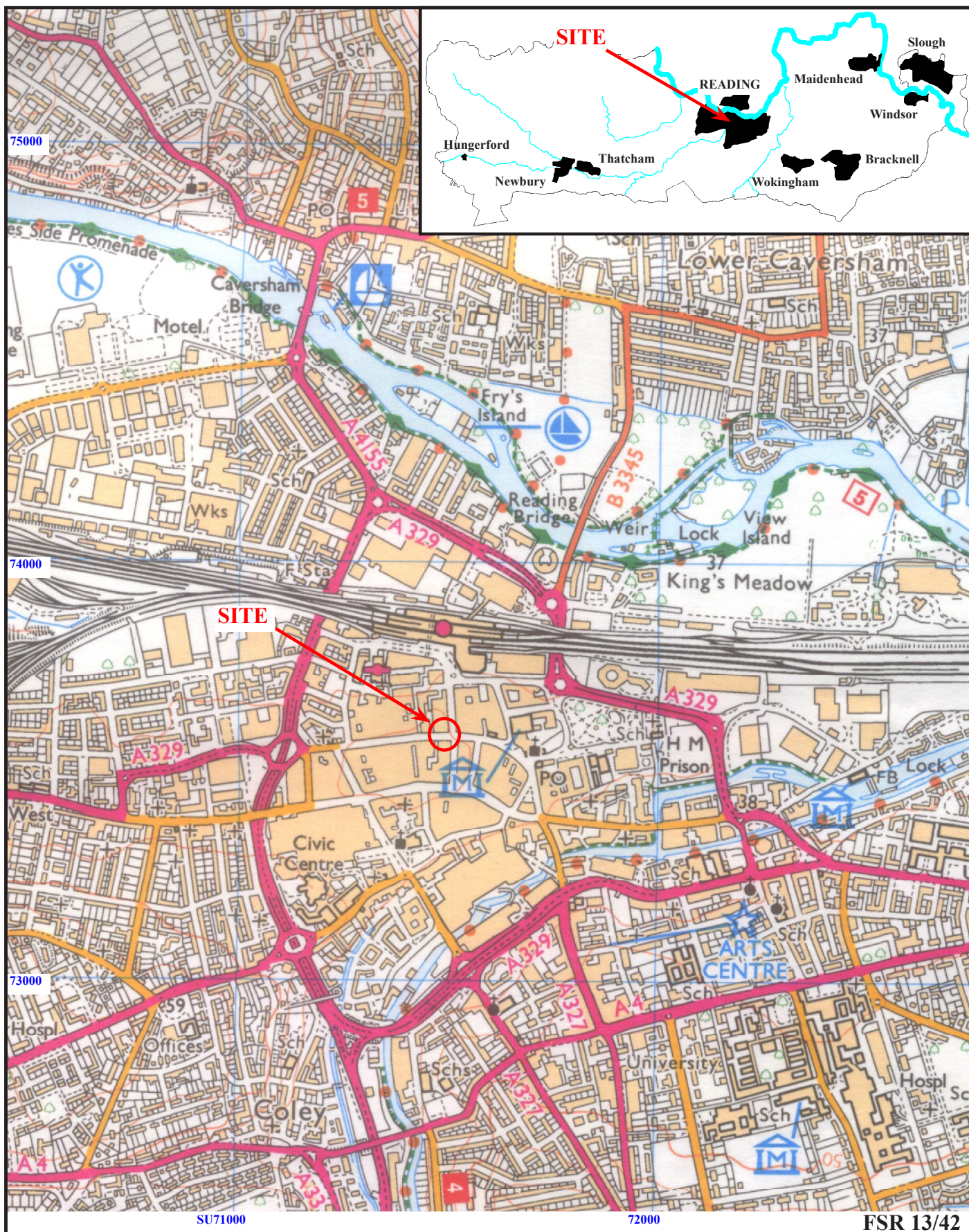
**APPENDIX 4:** Catalogue of Ceramic Building Material

<i>Deposit</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>B-T</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt (g)</i>
60	Layer	T	22	2270

**APPENDIX 5:** Catalogue of leather objects

<i>Context</i>	<i>Soles</i>	<i>Upper/shaped</i>	<i>Rand/strap</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
60	15	10	18	22	65
Spoil	1	2	-	-	3
Total	16	12	18	22	68



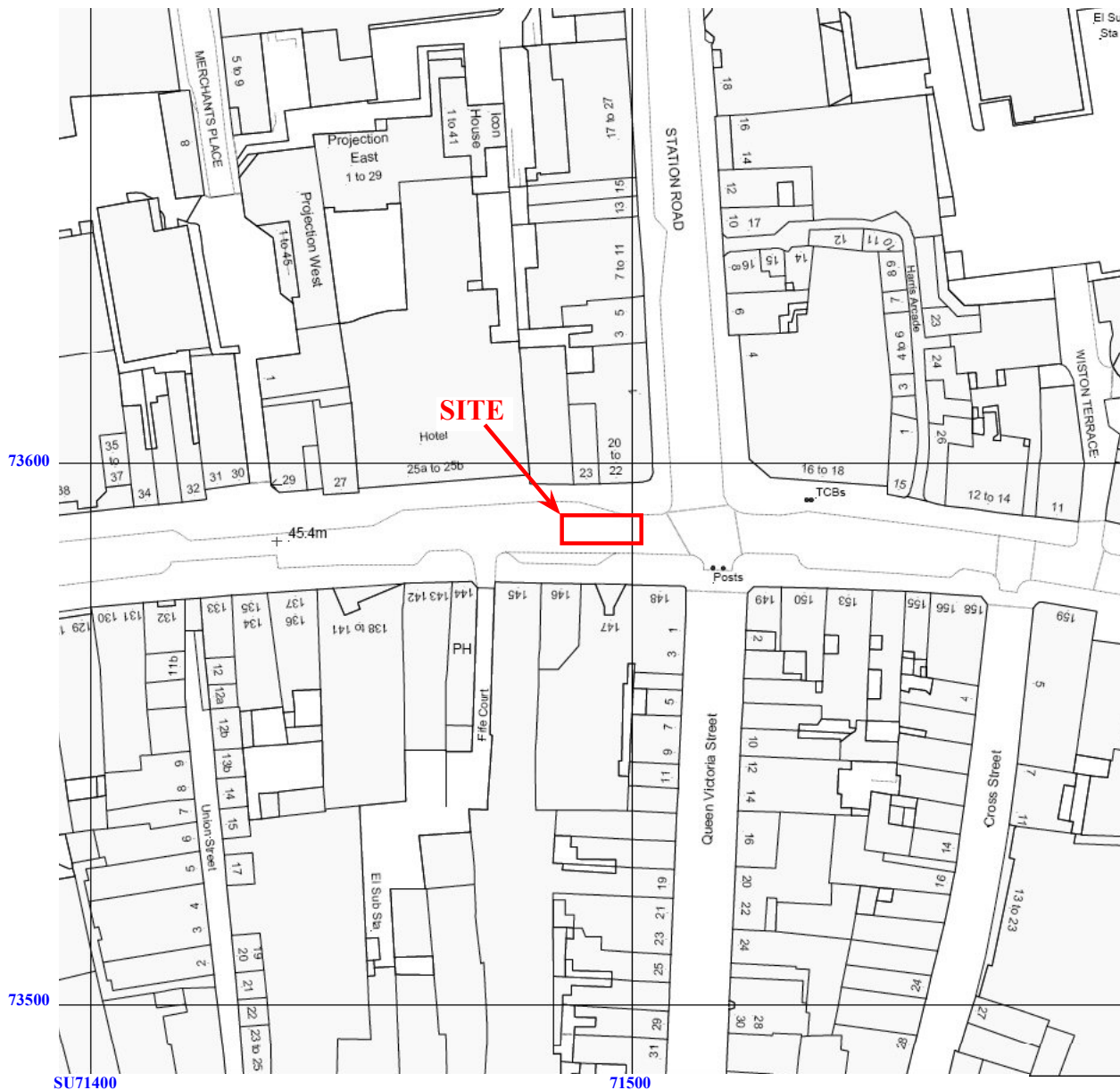


**Friar Street road surface repair, Reading,  
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 Figure 1. Location of site within Reading and Berkshire.

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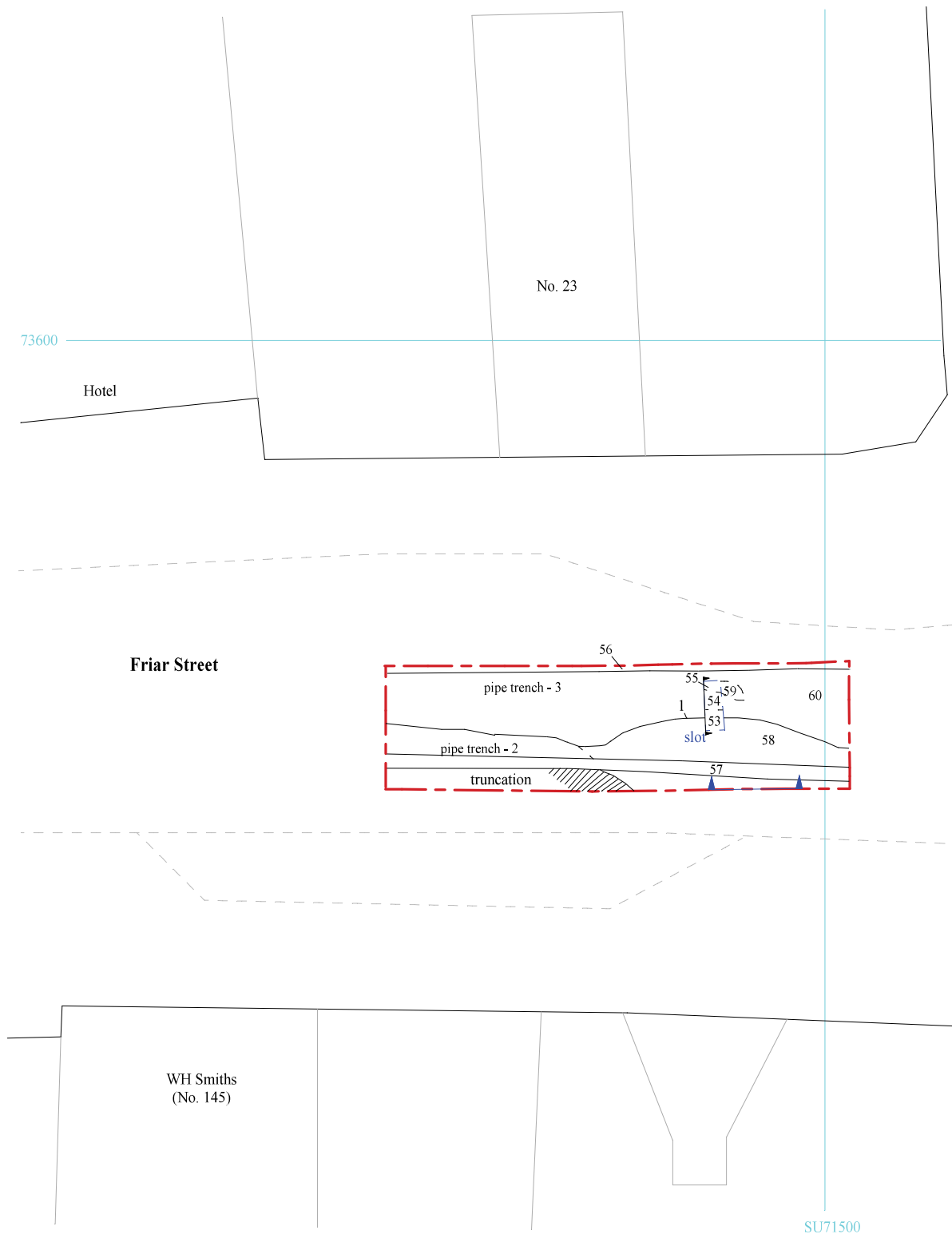
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Figure 2. Detailed location of site off Friar Street.

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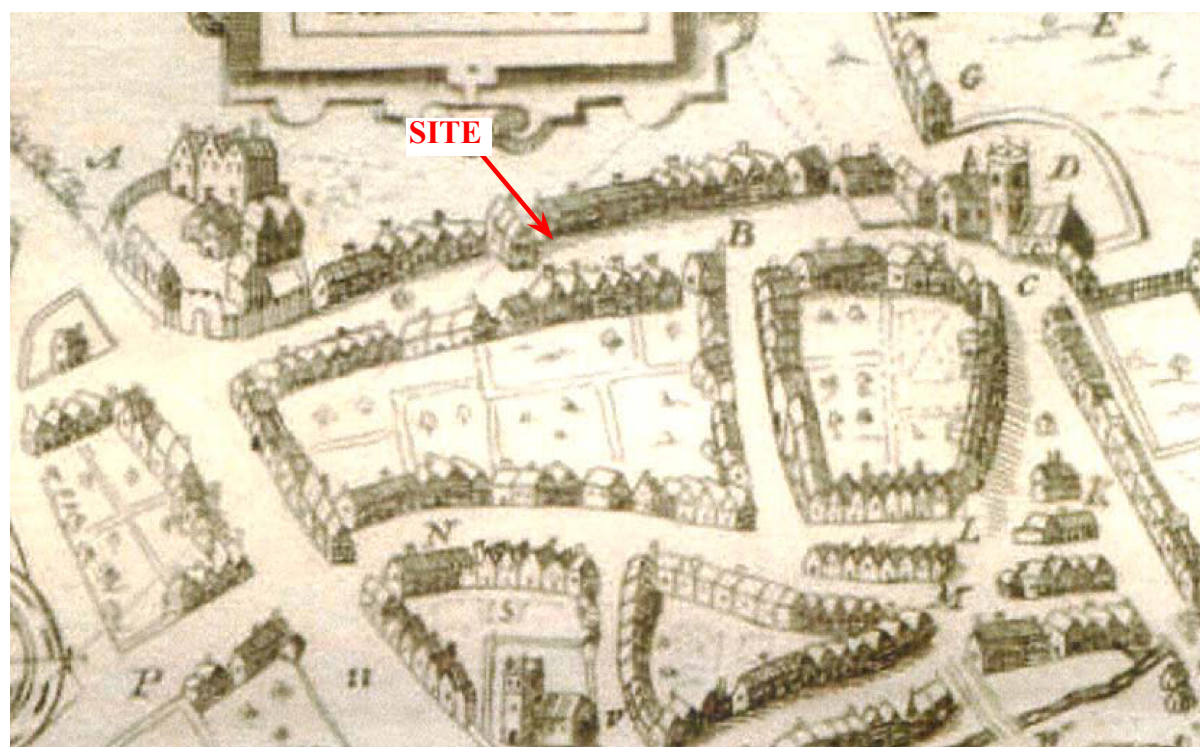
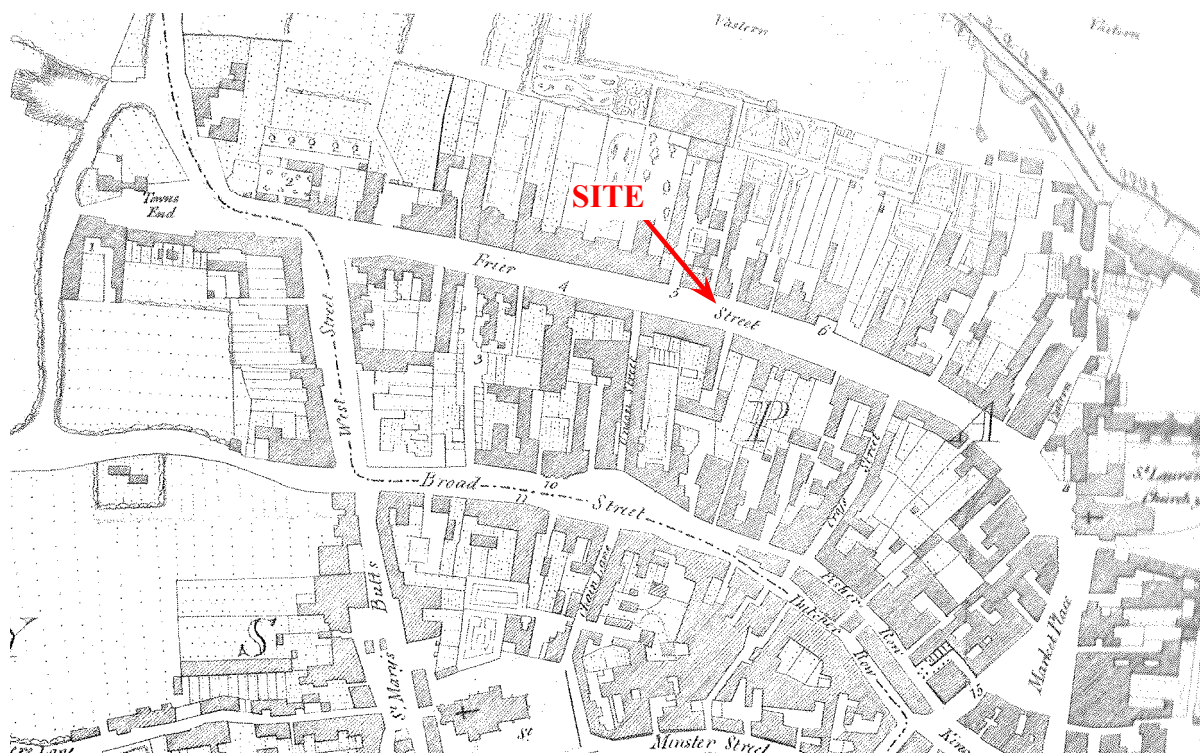
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Figure 3. Area observed.



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Figure 5. Coates' Reading map of 1802 (upper) and Speed's  
Reading map of 1610 (lower).

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Plate 1. Area of investigation, looking east, Scales: 2m and 1m.



Plate 2. Section showing edge of cut 1 through layer 60, looking west, Scales: 1m and 0.3m.

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Plates 1 and 2.

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Plate 3. Example of leather shoe recovered from layer 60, Scale: 100mm.

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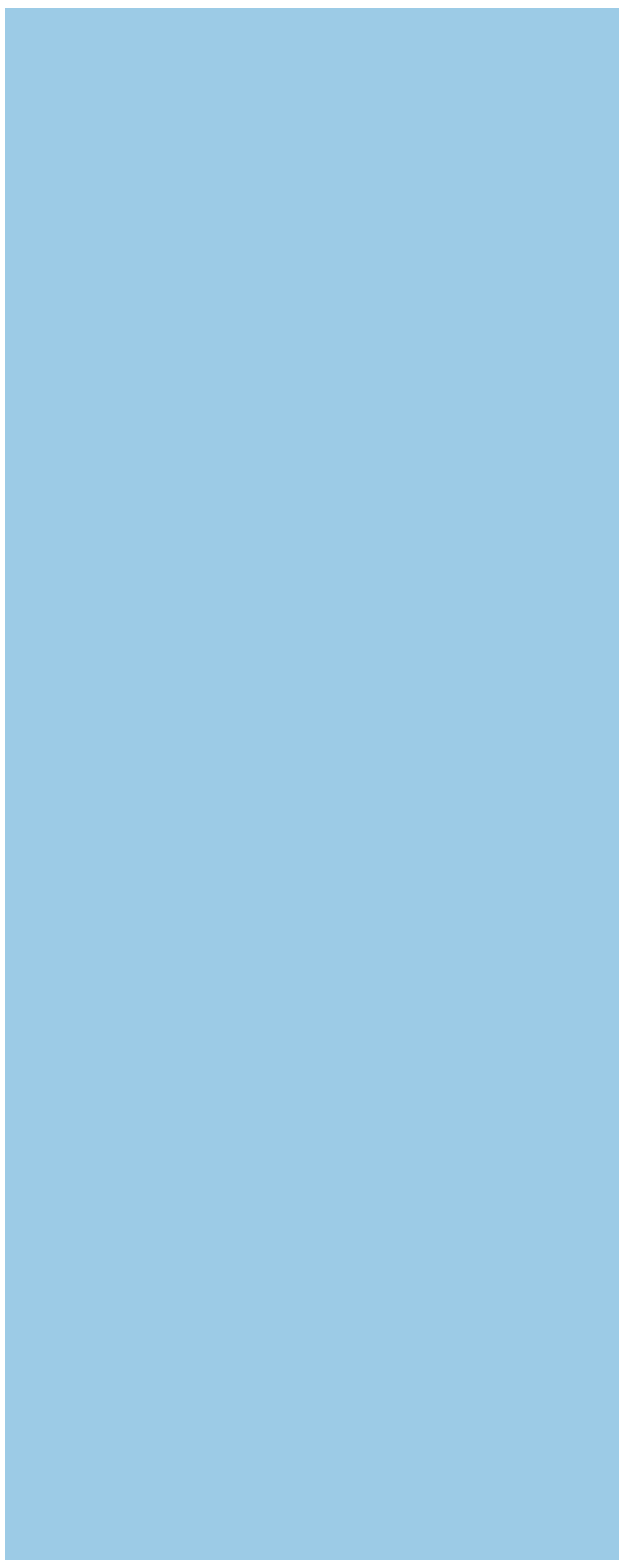
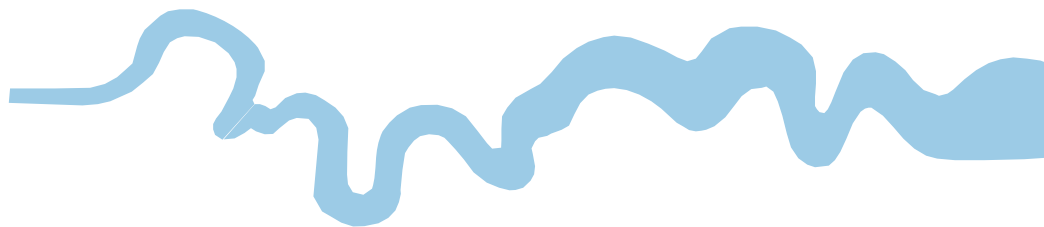
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Plate 3.

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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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