

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

—ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**Land at St. Andrew's Church,
Sonning, Berkshire**

Archaeological Evaluation

by Genni Elliott

**Site Code: ACS13/99
(SU7553 7553)**

**St. Andrew's Church, Sonning,
Berkshire**

**An Archaeological Evaluation
for Sonning Parochial Church Council**

by Genni Elliott
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code ACS 13/99

August 2013

Summary

Site name: St. Andrew's Church, Sonning, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU7553 7553

Site activity: Archaeological Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 1st -2nd August 2013

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Genni Elliott

Site code: ACS 13/99

Area of site: c. 525m²

Summary of results: Archaeological features were found in one of the three trenches dug. The earliest feature was a ditch containing Iron Age pottery which was cut by three, intercutting pits of medieval date. A moderate collection of struck flint of Mesolithic to Bronze Age date was also recovered to indicate earlier prehistoric activity in the area.

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

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St. Andrew's Church, Sonning, Berkshire An Archaeological Evaluation

by Genni Elliott

Report 13/99

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at St. Andrew's Church, Sonning, Berkshire (NGR SU 7553 7553) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr. Perry Mills of Oaktree Interiors Ltd., Frederick House, 498 Reading Road, Winnersh, Berkshire, RG41 5EX on behalf of the Parochial Church Council.

Planning permission is to be sought from Wokingham Borough Council for the construction for new parish rooms divided into two blocks. It is anticipated that information relating to archaeology will be required to accompany the application and that any consent may be subject to an archaeological condition. This is in accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government's *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2012), and the Borough Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Ms. Fiona MacDonald of Berkshire Archaeology.

The fieldwork was undertaken by Genni Elliott and Dan Bray on 1st-2nd August 2013 and the site code is ACS 13/99. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with a local museum in due course.

Location, topography and geology

St. Andrew's Church is located in the village of Sonning to the northeast of Reading. The church is located to the west of the High Street, behind the Bull Inn and just southeast of the River Thames (Fig. 1). The site itself lies to the southwest of the church within a walled area, the eastern end of which is now part of the graveyard. The location of the proposed buildings lies on a patch of unused land, partially grassed over and partially overgrown with weeds. The ground is uneven and rises slightly from the north to the south, from 40.74m to 42.92m above Ordnance Datum. The underlying geology is described as being on the border between Valley Gravel and Upper Chalk (BGS 1946). The actual geology encountered was loam (brickearth) above gravel and chalk in the far southeast end of trench 3.

Archaeological background

In general terms the site lies within the archaeologically rich Thames Valley with important prehistoric and Roman remains visible from the air situated to the east of the village (Ford, 1987; Gates, 1975; Slade, 1964). St. Andrew's Church lies within the Saxon and medieval settlement of Sonning which was an important administrative and ecclesiastical centre. Various fieldwork projects have revealed deposits within the settlement. To the west is the Bishop's Palace, the known remains, which date from the 13th century, were partly excavated during the First World War and revealed medieval buildings (Brakspear 1916). More recent fieldwork has examined a part of the later Elizabethan mansion on that site (Milbank 2010). Other excavations for the building of a new vicarage, just to the north, uncovered deposits of late Saxon and early medieval date (Hull and Hall, 2003). Charnel deposits of uncertain date have been recovered from the Bull Inn to the east (Milbank, 2007) with Saxon inhumations nearby. At Old Walls, to the south, medieval boundary features have been found (Milbank, 2006, Taylor, 2006).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the area of development. More specifically one of the aims was to determine whether any deposits were present relating to the pre-medieval Diocese were present.

Three trenches were excavated using a kubota-type machine and a ditching bucket supervised by an archaeologist down to archaeologically sensitive levels. The trenches were to be located as much as possible on the intended footprint of the buildings.

Results

The three trenches were dug ranging from 5m to 9m long and up to 1.60m deep. Trench 1 had to be re-positioned from its original position due to the presence of a protected tree and large tree stump to the north.. Due to trench 1 being relocated, trench 2 was also moved and rotated. A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

Trench 1 (Figs 3 and 4; Pls 1 and 2)

Trench 1 was aligned north east - southwest and was 7.5m long and up to 1.60m deep. The sides were battered back to facilitate safe access. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.30m of topsoil, above 0.34m of loamy soil (51) that

contained more gravel towards the south, above 0.76m of further loamy soil (52) which contained abundant ceramic building material and two sherds of pottery from the 20th century. This in turn lay above brickearth natural geology. The brickearth was only 0.2m thick and overlay gravel.

Four features were found cut into the brickearth. One was a ditch (1), possibly of Iron Age date and three were inter-cutting medieval pits (2, 3 and 4).

Ditch 1 was aligned north east – south west and was at least 5m long, more than 1.18m wide and 0.20m deep. It had steep sides and a flat base. Its only fill, (56), was pale grey with yellowish brown mottles loam. Finds consisted of 2 sherds of Iron Age pottery, an intrusive sherd of modern pottery and 15 prehistoric struck flints.

Pit 3 was cut by pits 2 and 4 and it was therefore not possible to establish the exact shape of the feature, but it may have been oval in shape with a fairly flat base. It measured more than 1.5m long by more than 0.40m wide by 0.47m deep and was filled with a dark brownish grey loam (58). Finds consisted of a sherd of Iron Age pottery, a sherd of medieval pottery and a flint flake.

Pits 2 and 4 cut both ditch 1 and pit 3; the relationship between the two features could not be established. Pit 2 was oval in shape with fairly steep sides and a flat base. It measured 2m long by 0.64m wide by 0.35m deep and contained one fill. Fill (57) was a dark greyish brown, loam with a moderate amount of small stones. Pit 4 was possibly oval in shape with gently sloping sides and a flat base and measured 2.30m long by more than 1.20m wide by 0.44m deep. It contained three fills numbered 59-61. The earliest fill (61) was dark greyish brown loam (61). Above this was a dark yellowish brown, sandy clay (60).. The uppermost fill was a dark greyish brown loam (59). Finds consisted of three prehistoric flint flakes.

Trench 2 (Fig.3; Pl. 3)

Trench 2 was aligned northwest - southeast and was 5m long and up to 1.20m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.15m of topsoil, above 0.25m of gravel (55), above 0.75m of buried soil (52). This lay above brickearth natural geology which was above gravel. No archaeological finds nor deposits were revealed.

Trench 3 (Fig. 3; Pl. 4)

Trench 3 was aligned west north west – east south east and was 9m long and 1.10m deep at the west north west end rising to 0.80m deep at the east southeast end. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.26m of topsoil, above 0.76m

of buried soil (52). This lay above brickearth natural geology which was above gravel At the far east southeast end chalk outcropped beneath buried soil layer (52). No archaeological finds nor deposits were revealed.

Finds

Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 9 sherds with a total weight of 181g. The following fabric types were noted:

IA: Iron Age Shelly Ware. ?Mid – late Iron Age. Soft, hand-built fabric with moderate shell fragments up to 5mm. 3 sherds, 24g

NAB: Newbury ‘A/B’ ware. Late 11th – late 14th century (Mephram 1997, 51-2). A range of sand-, flint- and limestone-tempered wares. Sparse to moderate limestone up to 2mm, rounded white or clear quartz up to 0.5mm, angular fragments of white, grey or black flint. Jars bowls and pitchers. 2 sherds, 31g.

M40: ‘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 (op. cit. Mellor 1994, 86). Known at numerous sites in south Oxfordshire and Berkshire. 1 sherd, 4g.

MOD: Miscellaneous 19th and 20th century wares. Mass-produced white earthenwares, stonewares etc. 3 sherds, 122g.

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Appendix 3. The range of fabric types is fairly typical of sites in the region, and suggests that there was activity at the site in the mid-late Iron Age, and again in the early medieval period.

The shell-tempered Iron Age pottery is somewhat unusual, as pottery of this type in the region usually has sand-, grog-, or flint-temper (eg. Timby et al. 2005, table 15), although it is well-attested at sites further to the north, such as Abingdon (eg. DeRoche 1978). The sherds show some attrition, with most of the calcareous inclusions in the surfaces leached out, but this is more likely to be due to the soil conditions rather than transportation, and they are otherwise in fairly good condition. The small sherd of modern material, in context (56), is most likely intrusive.

Brick and tile by Danielle Milbank

Brick and tile fragments were recovered from three contexts encountered during the evaluation and detailed in Appendix 4). In total, 21 fragments weighing 1310g were present, the majority of which were tile fragments. The fabric was examined under x10 magnification. The fragments from deposit 57 are of a hard, evenly fired fine clay fabric with very occasional small groggy inclusions. The pieces are thick (one is 16mm and the other

18mm thick) with a fairly regular form and some edge-thickening. One fragment has a white sandy mortar which suggests re-use.

They have a rough base, indicating they were hand-made in a sandy mould, are of a mid to light red colour and have no other notable characteristics.

The fragments from deposit 58 include a fragment 13mm thick, with a rough base with frequent small and medium-sized angular flint inclusions, though the fabric overall is fine with sparse small groggy inclusions. It is hard and evenly-fired, and a mid to pale red, and the form is slightly irregular and suggestive of a date in the medieval period. A second piece of similar fabric with a light colour has a peg hole.

The other fragments are a hard, evenly fired darker red fabric, with few inclusions, and a sharper-edged, more regular form, two of which have peg holes. These pieces are more likely to be from the late medieval or post-medieval periods.

The material from context 59 includes a brick fragment which is rough and irregular in form, 54mm thick, and of a slightly soft fine sandy clay fabric with small groggy inclusions and occasional air bubbles. Although brick dating based on thickness can only be tentative, the characteristics of the piece suggest that it is from the range c.15th to 17th century. A fragment of tile from this context is a fine, hard clay fabric with sparse sandy and occasional flint inclusions and it is a pale orange red colour with a grey (reduced) core. The form is regular, with sharp edges, and the piece can be only broadly dated to the medieval or early post-medieval periods.

Struck Flint by Steve Ford

A small collection comprising 19 struck flints were recovered from the site (Appendix 5). The collection comprised 11 flakes a blade, 6 spalls (pieces under 20x20mm) and a fragment of a nodule that had been partly flaked. Some of the flint has rough cortex remaining but for others it is smooth suggesting sources from gravel and chalk both of which are present nearby. One of the flakes was a core rejuvenation flake. The intact blade was lightly patinated bluish white (as was one spall and the tested nodule). The blade certainly, and the other patinated pieces possibly, are indicative of a Mesolithic date. None of the other pieces are chronologically distinctive and only a broad Neolithic or Bronze Age date can be suggested.

Animal Bone by Genni Elliott

A small assemblage of disarticulated animal bone was collected from two contexts. A total of five fragments of animal bone were recovered weighing 49g. The remains were moderately well preserved, with little surface

erosion but were totally fragmented which meant identification was not possible. Three fragments came from ditch 1 (56) and were probably from large mammals (horse or cow). The remaining two fragments came from pit 4 (59), one of which was probably from a large mammal and the other from a small cat-sized animal.

Conclusion

The evaluation has revealed the presence of archaeological deposits on the site in one of the three trenches dug. The earliest material recovered is of prehistoric date. The earliest feature was a ditch containing Iron Age pottery which provides a *terminus post quem* date. This feature also contained a surprisingly large collection of struck flint. The collection is not homogenous and includes material of Mesolithic and Neolithic/Bronze Age date. This material is not contemporary with the Iron Age pottery but its presence suggests the possibility of a flint scatter /occupation site through which a later ditch has been dug. This ditch was subsequently cut by a further three pits of medieval or later date, which were also intercutting.

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APPENDIX 1: Trench details
 0m at the south or west end

Trench	Length (m)	Breadth (m)	Depth (m)	Comment
1	7.5	2	1.6	0–0.30m turf and topsoil, dark brown loam; 0.30-0.64m, yellowish brown loam with increasing amounts of gravel to the south; 0.64-1.40m, dark brown, loam; 1.40-1.60m, natural geology (brickearth) dark yellowish brown, sandy clay loam; 1.60m+ natural geology gravel/ sandy clay. Ditch 1, pits 2-4. [PIs 1-2]
2	5	2	1.2	0–0.15m turf/topsoil; 0.15-0.40m gravel and yellowish brown loam; 0.40-1.15m, dark brown, loam; 1.15-1.20m brickearth natural geology; 1.20m+ gravel / sandy clay natural geology. [PI. 3]
3	9	2	1.10	0–0.26m turf/topsoil; 0.26-1.02m dark brown loam; 1.02-1.10m (NW end) brickearth natural geology; 1.10m+ (NW end) gravel/sandy/clay natural geology; 0.75m+ (SE end) chalk natural geology. [PI. 4]

APPENDIX 2: Feature details

Trench	Cut	Fill (s)	Type	Date	Dating evidence
1	1	56	Ditch	Late Iron Age?	Pottery
1	2	57	Pit		
1	3	58	Pit	Early medieval	Pottery
1	4	59, 60, 61	Pit		

APPENDIX 3: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

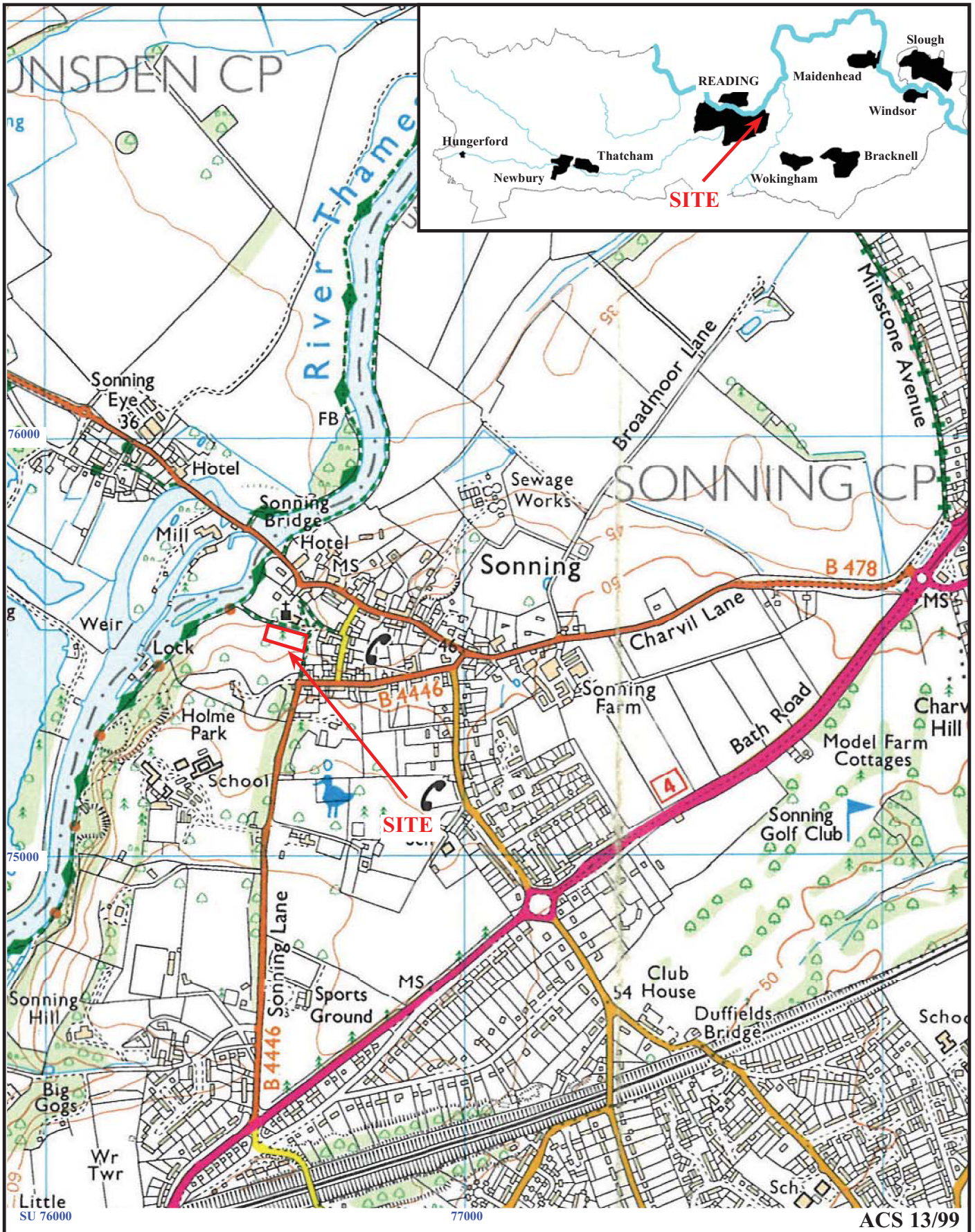
Trench	Cut/fill	Iron Age		NAB		M40		MOD	
		No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt
1	52			2	31			2	117
1	1(56)	2	21					1	5
1	3(58)	1	3			1	4		
	Total	3	24	2	31	1	4	3	122

APPENDIX 4: Catalogue of Brick and tile

Cut	Deposit	Group No	Type	No	Wt (g)
2	57		Pit	4	238
3	58		Pit	8	528
4	59		Pit	9	544

APPENDIX 5: Catalogue of struck flint

Trench	Context	Type
1	1 (56)	7 intact flakes; 1 blade; 1 core rejuvenation flake; 5 spalls; 1 flaked nodule fragment
1	3(58)	1 intact flake
1	4(59)	1 Intact flake; 1 Broken flake; 1 spall

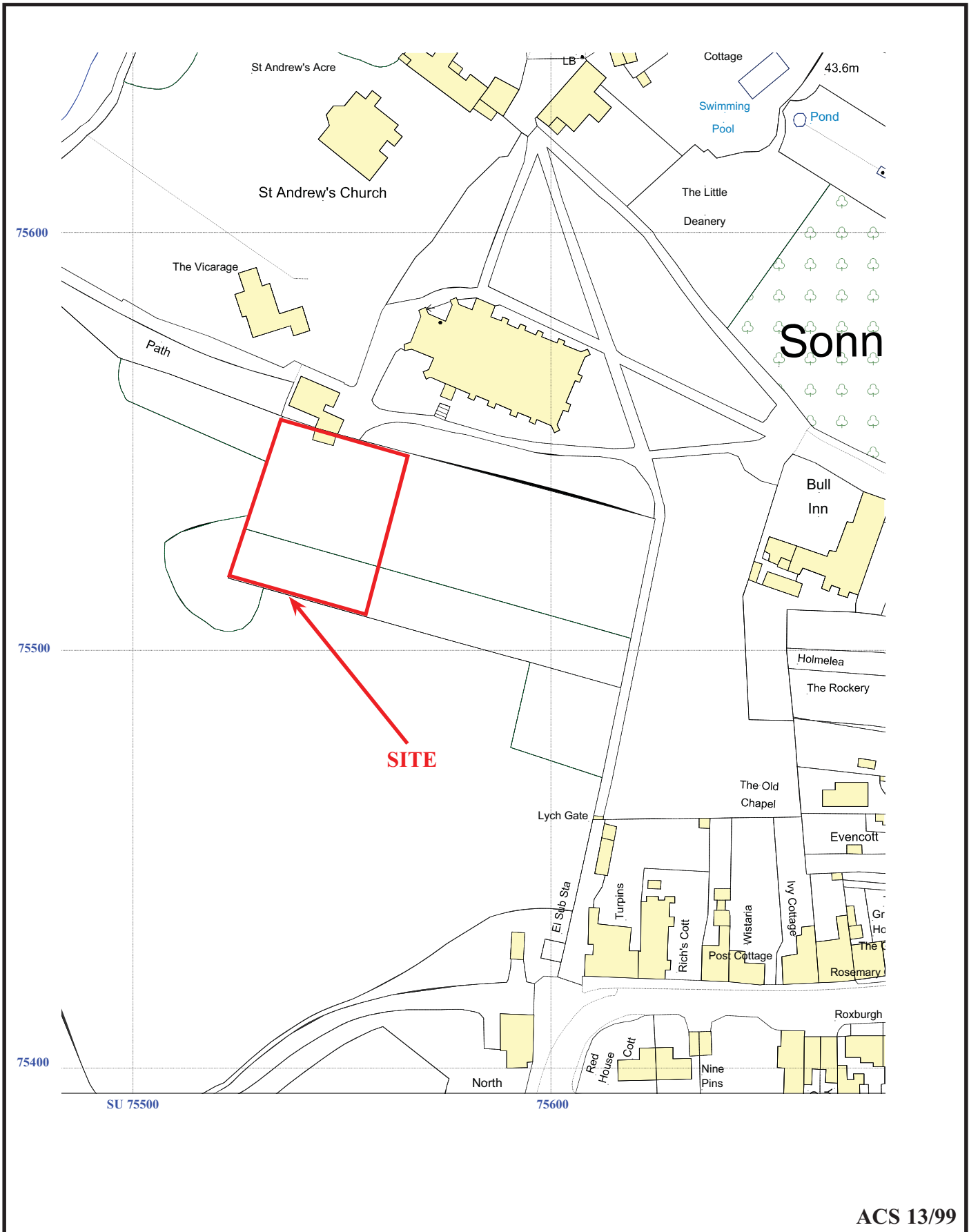


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Figure 1. Location of site within Sonning and Berkshire.

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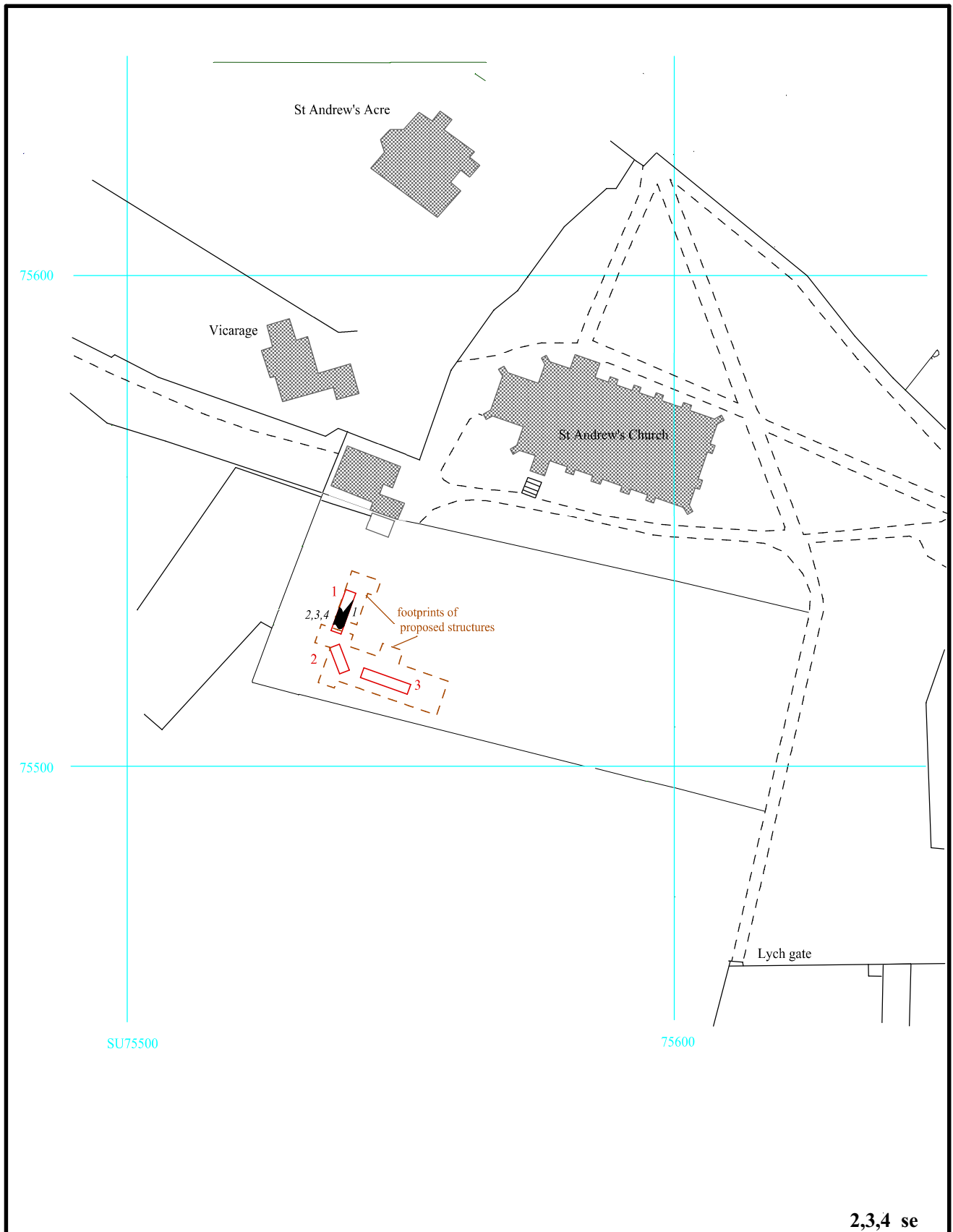
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 Figure 2. Detailed location of site within Sonning.

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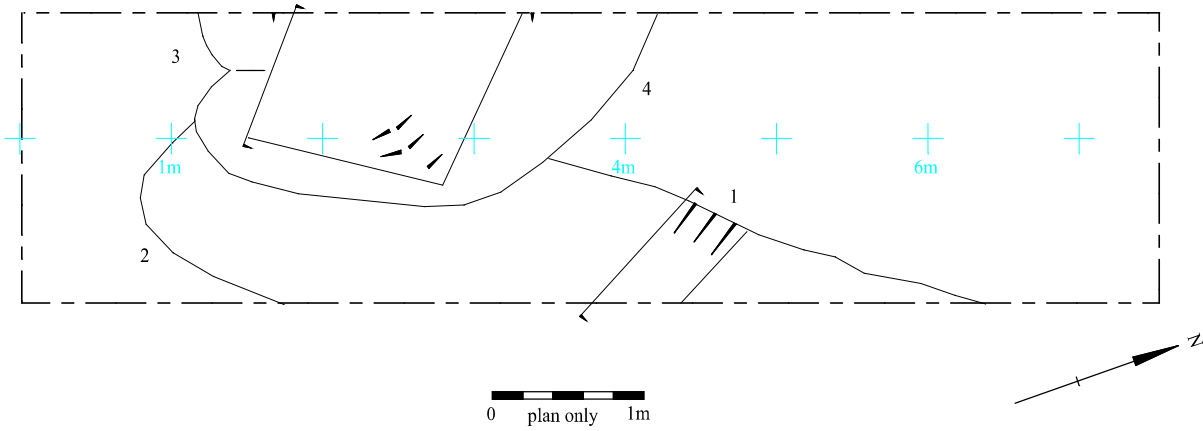
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Figure 3. Location of trenches



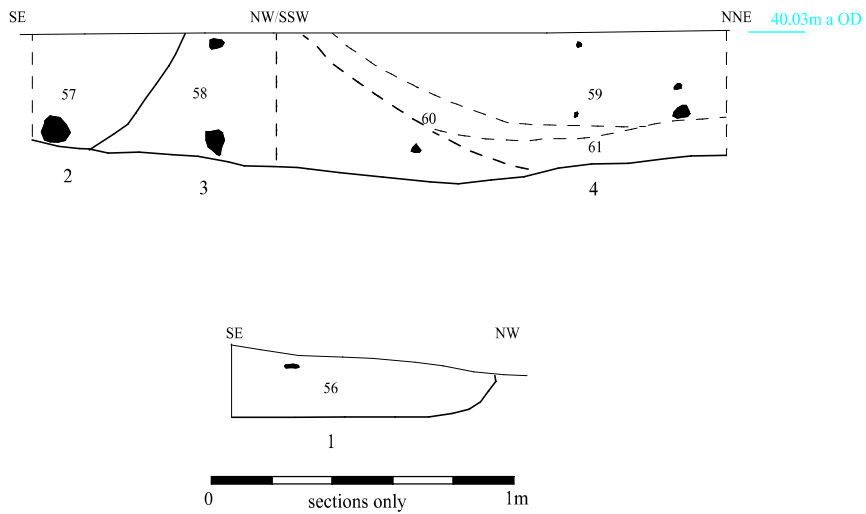
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Trench 1



Trench 1

Top of trench (side battered back)



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Figure 4. Plan and sections of features in trench 1.



Plate 1. Trench 1 looking north, Scales 2m and 1m



Plate 2. Trench 1 looking south, features 1-4, Scales: 1m and 0.1m.

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Plates 1 to 2.

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Plate 3. Trench 2 looking north east, Scales 2m and 1m.



Plate 4. Trench 3 looking north west, Scales: 2m and 1m.

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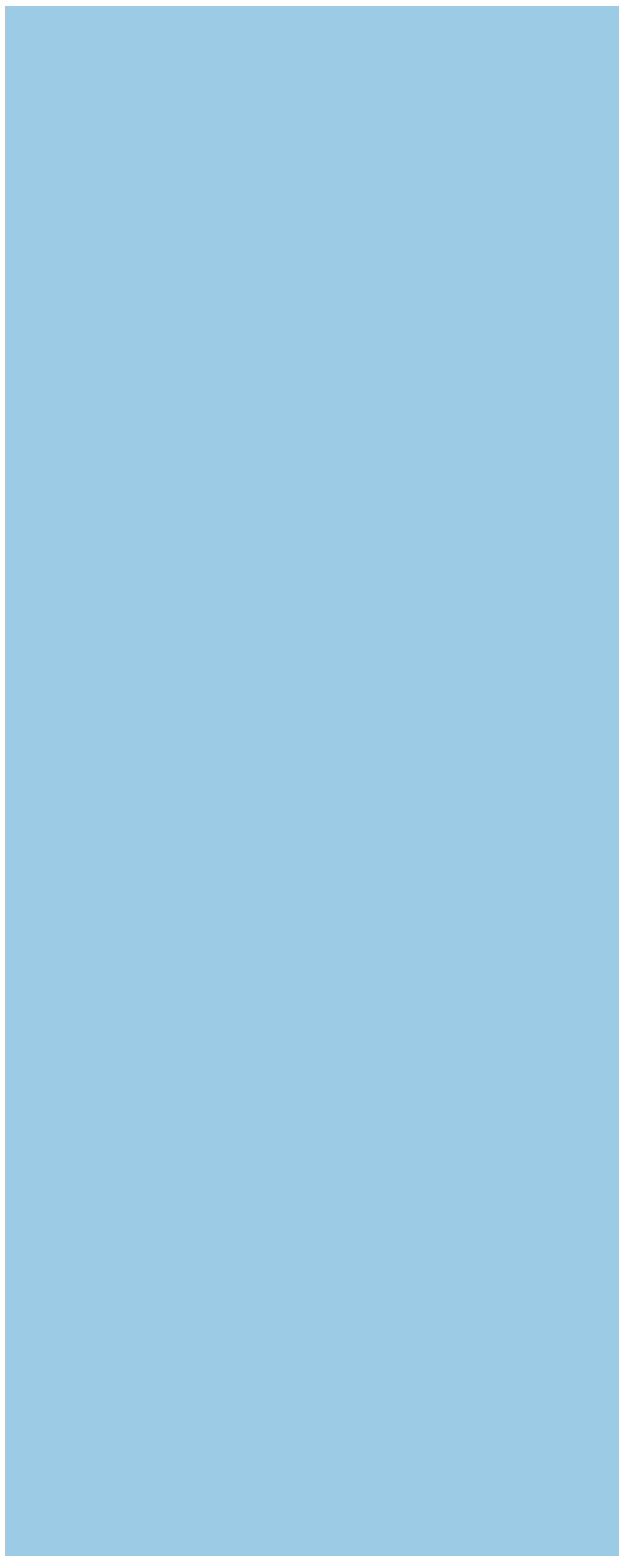
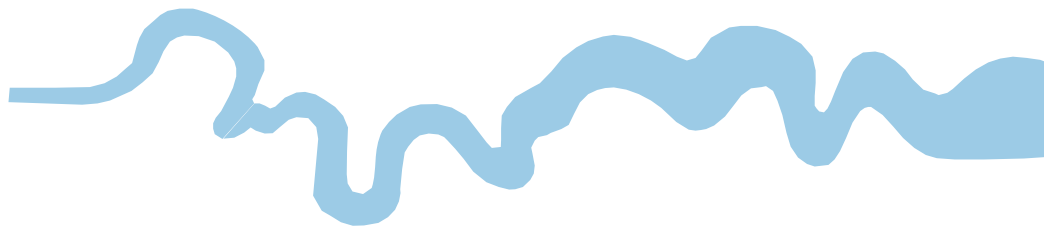
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Plates 3 to 4.

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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