

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**Aldwych House, Blagrove Street,
Reading, Berkshire**

Archaeological Evaluation

by Susan Porter

Site Code: AHR13/214

(SU7167 7368)

**Aldwych House, Blagrove Street,
Reading, Berkshire**

**An Archaeological Evaluation
for CgMs Consulting Limited**

by Susan Porter
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code AHR 13/214
Thameseval1 164133

November 2013

Summary

Site name: Aldwych House, Blagrove Street, Reading, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU7167 7368

Site activity: Archaeological Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 5th and 6th November 2013

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Susan Porter

Site code: AHR 13/214

Area of site: c. 0.24 ha

Summary of results: Three small trenches were excavated in the area of a basement access ramp on the eastern side of the site where archaeological deposits were expected to have survived. However, no deposits of archaeological significance were observed and no finds recovered.

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.

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Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford ✓ 13.11.13
	Steve Preston ✓ 12.11.13

Aldwych House, Blagrove Street, Reading, Berkshire An Archaeological Evaluation

by Susan Porter

Report 13/214

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at Aldwych House, Blagrove Street, Reading, Berkshire (SU 7167 7368) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Chris Clarke of CgMs 140 London Wall, London EC2Y 5DN on behalf of Flanagan Lawrence.

It is proposed to redevelop the property of Aldwych House (Planning app no. 10/00989/FUL). The proposed development involving demolition of the existing structure and construction of a new building will affect any archaeological remains that may be present. Due to the site's archaeological potential, a programme of archaeological evaluation has been requested as part of the conditions associated with planning permission.

This is in accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government's *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2012), and the County Council's policies on archaeology. It is acknowledged that NPPF has superseded PPG16 (1992) and PPS5 (2010). The field investigation was carried out to a specification prepared by CgMs Consulting (Clarke 2013) and approved by Berkshire Archaeology, advisers to Reading Borough Council on matters relating to archaeology. The fieldwork was undertaken by Susan Porter and Tom Stewart on 5th and 6th November 2013 and the site code is AHR 13/214. 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 east centre of Reading, on the ridge of land that lies between the River Thames to the north and River Kennet to the south. It lies 750m west of the confluence of the rivers Thames and Kennet (Fig. 1). The existing building fronts onto Forbury Road to the north, Blagrove street to the west, with current site access off Vine Street to the south (Fig. 2). The site lies on a progressive slope from 43.9m aOD in the south-west, down to 42.7m aOD in the north and c. 41m aOD in the east. The underlying geology is recorded as Upper Chalk and pebble gravel (BGS 1971), the Upper Chalk was observed in Trench 2 and gravel in Trench 1.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site has been highlighted in a desk-based assessment for the project (Darton 2008). In summary this potential stems from its location within the historic (Saxon/medieval) core of Reading *c.* 80m north-west of the Scheduled Monument (No. 19019) of Reading Abbey and west of the Registered Historic Park and Garden (GD 1576) of Forbury Gardens. The site is considered to lie just outside the north-west corner of the abbey precinct. Fieldwork just to the south of the site to the rear of 1 Friar Street revealed residual Bronze Age finds and elements of a medieval building comprising walls, foundations and chalk floors possibly part of the *Hospitium* Almshouses (Pine 2005). Later medieval or post-medieval metalworking activity debris was also recorded attested.

Roman coins were found *c.* 200m south of Aldwych House during works on Broad and groundwork near the engine sheds of Reading station *c.* 150m north-west of the site revealed the skeletons of a man and horse with a sword of 9th century date. Three inhumations of 7th/8th century date were discovered immediately north of St James' Church and Forbury Gardens. Fieldwork in advance of construction of the Forbury Road roundabout to the north east revealed a length of the Abbey's Plummery Wall and groundwork in the Forbury gardens revealed remains of the Abbey's medieval cemetery, believed to have continued in use after the Dissolution until 1556.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was to establish whether any archaeological evidence survived on the site, to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits irrespective of period within the area of development. The evaluation was also to clarify the nature and extent of existing disturbance and intrusions and hence assess the degree of archaeological survival of buried deposits and any surviving structures of archaeological significance.

The specific aims of the evaluation were:

- to establish the presence or otherwise of any activity pre-dating the medieval period;
- to establish the presence or otherwise of medieval activity at the site. Can this evidence be associated with Reading Abbey?
- to establish the presence or otherwise of Post-medieval and Modern activity;
- to evaluate the likely impact of past land use and development; and
- to provide sufficient information to, if appropriate, construct an archaeological mitigation strategy.

It was proposed to excavate three trial trenches each 1.50m x 1.50m to evaluate the area for archaeological potential. All features encountered were to be located and assessed and the results of this preliminary survey were to provide the basis for considering any further mitigation measures.

The trenches were to be opened by a mechanical digger equipped in the first instance with a breaker and thereafter with a toothless ditching bucket. Once the upper layers of concrete were removed the lower layers were to be removed in spits no more than 0.25m deep until either archaeologically relevant horizons or natural geology was reached or the trench reached a depth where it was unsafe to continue. The machine was to be under archaeological supervision at all times. A metal detector was to be used to survey spoil heaps for metal finds.

Results

All three trenches were dug as intended (Fig. 3). They ranged in length and width from 1.50-1.70m and in depth from 0.80m-1.60m. Trench 3 was relocated slightly to the south-east of its intended position due to the proximity of live services to the north and a large drain to the west.

A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1. A summary of excavated feature details forms Appendix 2.

Trench 1 (Fig. 4; Pls 1 and 2)

Trench 1 was aligned north-south and was 1.70m long, 1.50m wide and 1.60m deep with a surface height of 41.87m aOD. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.20m of concrete and 0.10m modern brick (50) overlying 0.20m loose brown orange sandy gravel made ground (51), which in turn overlay 1.10m loose black grey gravel sand made ground with frequent brick and tile inclusions and occasional chalky flecks (52). At a depth of 1.60m (40.20m aOD) brown/orange gravel natural geology was observed (Pl. 2). Layer (50) comprised a brick surface of modern date (Pl. 1). The bricks were squared and grey in colour with surface dressing in imitation of cobbles measuring 230mm in length 110mm wide and 53mm in depth. The surface covered the entire area of trench 1 1.70m long and 1.50 wide, and comprised a single course of bricks in stretcher bond with a cement agent as a bonding material. The bricks were retained on site. This surface is likely to belong either to the building seen on the 1900 Ordnance Survey map, and still present until the 1960s, or possibly a short-lived structure first mapped in 1979 and gone by 1988. The outline of the former building is still visible on the wall of the building that adjoined it.

Trench 2 (Pl. 3)

Trench 2 was aligned north-south and was 1.70m long, 1.60m wide and 0.80m deep with a surface height of 41.76m aOD. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.20m of reinforced concrete and steel above 0.20m concrete, overlying 0.40m yellow/brown made ground containing frequent brick and tile inclusions, which in turn overlay

chalk natural geology at 41.01m aOD. No deposits of archaeological significance were observed and no finds were recovered.

Trench 3 (Figs 4; Pls 4 and 5)

Trench 3 was aligned east-west and was 1.70m long, 1.50m wide and 1.30m deep with a surface height of 43.33m aOD. The south facing stratigraphy consisted of 0.05m Tarmac and 0.40m concrete, overlying 0.85m grey silty clay made ground with concrete and brick inclusions. The north facing stratigraphy consisted of 0.05m Tarmac and 0.40m concrete, overlying 0.85m concrete slab foundation wall. The trench was taken to a depth of 1.30m (42.27m aOD) and could not be enlarged due to live services to the immediate north and a large drain to the west, as such it was deemed unsafe to excavate further. The presence of a basement to the building to the east was suspected. Natural geology was not reached and it was suspected that made ground deposits may continue to the depth of the adjacent basement car park. No finds of archaeological interest were recovered.

Conclusion

The result of this evaluation demonstrates that the upper levels of the natural geology have been heavily truncated by post medieval activity on site, predominantly pertaining to the existing structure of Aldwych House. The modern surface (50) observed in Trench 1 is likely to be associated with a building of the early 20th century, or possibly one of short lived duration first visible on the Ordnance Survey map of 1979, but apparently demolished by the 1988 Ordnance Survey.

Chalk natural geology was observed in Trench 2 at an excavated depth of 0.80m, a height of 41.01m AOD. As Vine Street to the south lies at c.44.70m AOD and Forbury Road immediately north of the site lies at 41.20m AOD it seems likely that there has been some truncation to the natural geology in the area of Trench 2 although not to the same extent as Trenches 1 and 3. This implies that Trench 2 lay outside of the structure observed in Trench 1 (50) and may have been a yard area and as such subject to less disturbance. However the presence in Trench 2 of two substantial concrete layers suggests an amount of truncation of the natural geology.

No deposits of archaeological interest were observed and no finds were recovered. Evidence for activity on the site is limited to constructions of mid 20th-century date with any evidence for earlier activity having been removed or truncated by the 20th-century constructions.

References

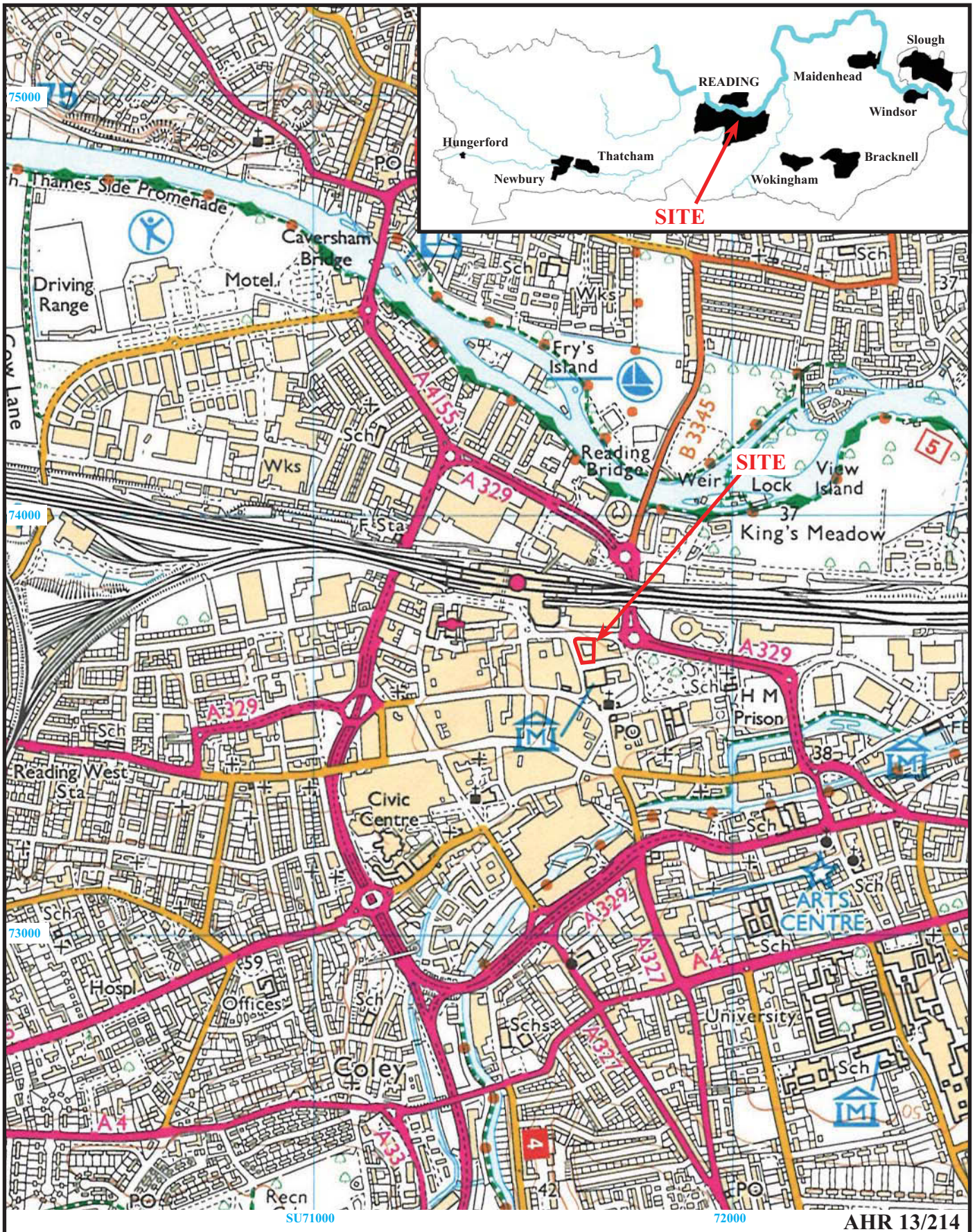
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APPENDIX 1: Trench details
 0m at south or west end

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	1.70m	1.50m	1.60m	0–0.20m Reinforced concrete; 0.20-0.30m brick surface (50); 0.30-0.50m brown/orange made ground (51); 0.50-1.60m black/grey made ground (52); 1.60m+ brown/orange gravel natural geology. [Pls 1-2]
2	1.70m	1.60m	0.80m	0–0.20m Reinforced concrete; 0.20-0.40m concrete; 0.40-0.80m yellow brown made ground; 0.80m+ chalk natural geology. [Pl. 3]
3	1.70m	1.50m	1.30m	0–0.05 Tarmac; 0.05-0.45m concrete; 0.45-1.30m grey silty clay made ground with concrete (north facing section 0.45-1.30m concrete slab); Natural geology not observed. [Pls 4 and 5]

APPENDIX 2: Feature details

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
1		50	Brick Surface	Modern c.1970s	Brick
1		51	Made Ground	Modern	NA
1		52	Made Ground	Modern	NA

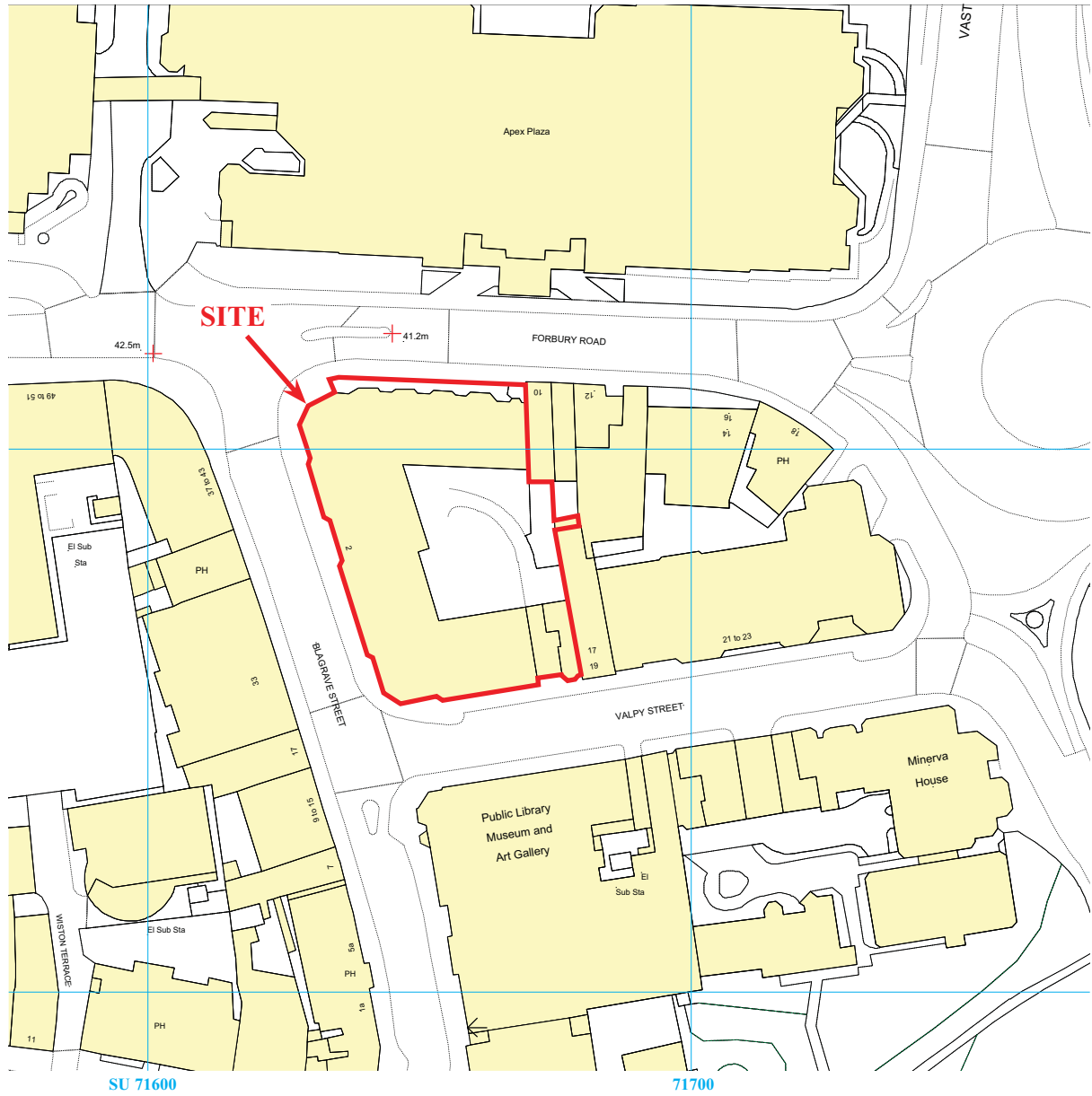


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Figure 1. Location of site within Reading and Berkshire.

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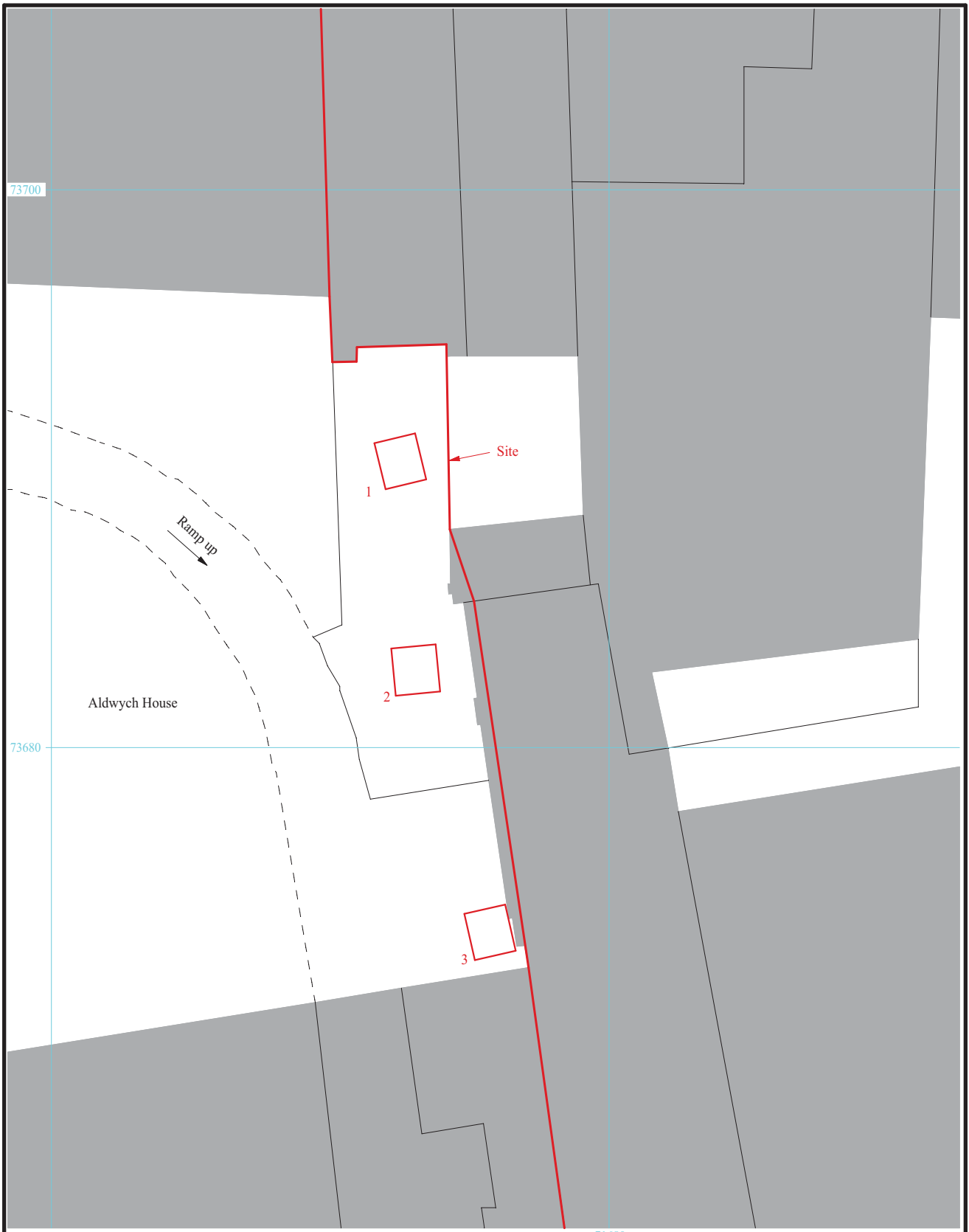


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Figure 2. Detailed location of site off Blagrove Street.

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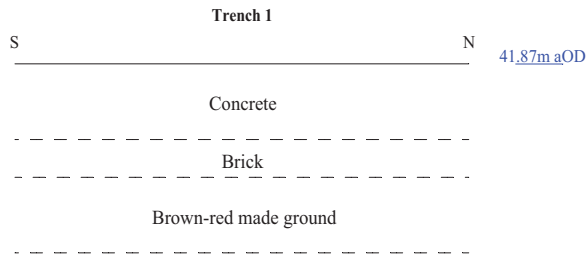


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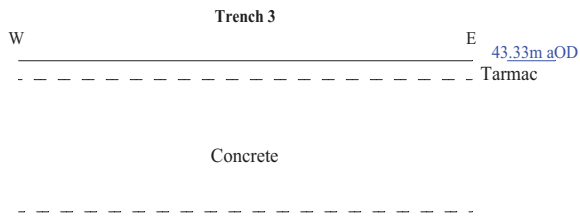
Figure 3. Trench locations.



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Black-grey made ground
with frequent brick/tile fragments



Grey silty clay made ground
with concrete and brick fragments

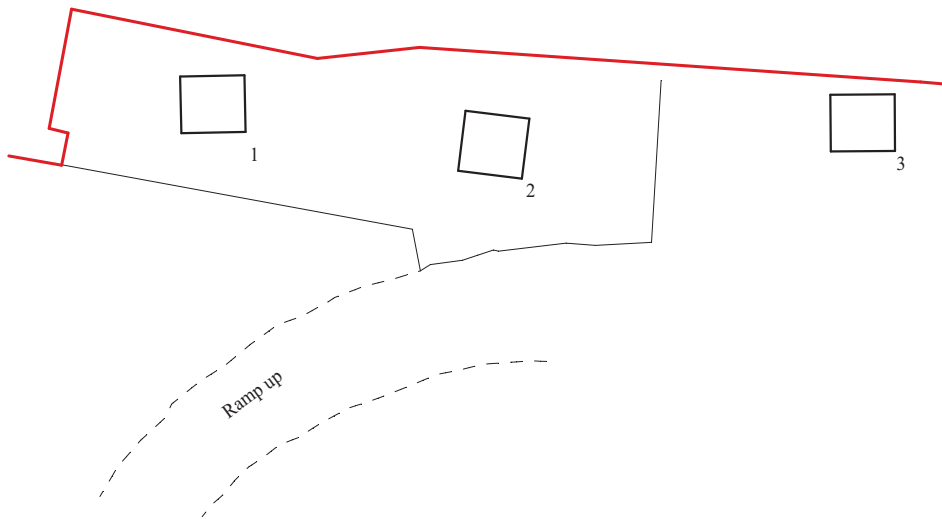
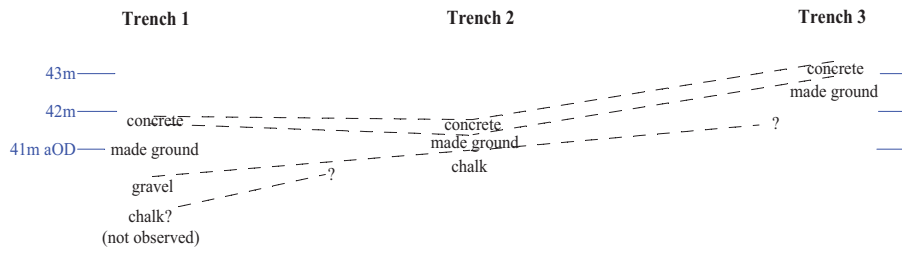


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Figure 4. Representative sections.





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Figure 5. Deposit model section.





Plate 1. Trench 1, modern brick surface (50), looking east, scale: 1m.



Plate 2. Trench 1, looking west, scales 1m and 2m.

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Plates 1 - 2.

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Plate 3. Trench 2, looking west, scales 2m and 1m.



Plate 4. Trench 3, looking north, scales 2m and 1m.

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Plates 3 - 4.

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Plate 5. Trench 3, looking south, scales 2m and 1m.

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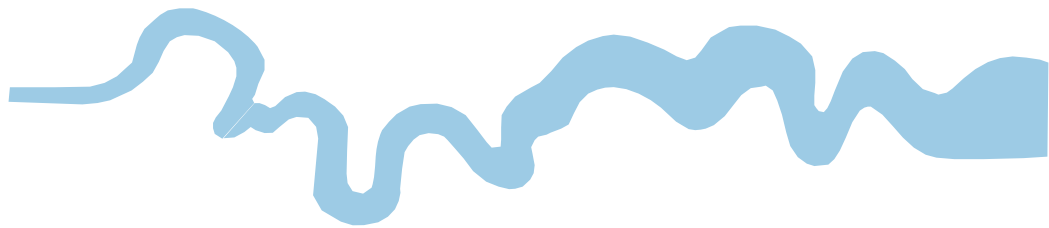
**Aldwych House, Blagrove Street,
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Plate 5.**

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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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