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ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**Proposed Primary School, The Ridgeway School,  
Whitley, Reading, Berkshire**

**Archaeological Evaluation**

**by Steve Ford**

**Site Code: RSR14/154**

**(SU 7300 7042)**

# **Proposed Primary School, The Ridgeway School, Whitley, Reading, Berkshire**

**An Archaeological Evaluation  
for Reading Borough Council**

by Steve Ford

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code RSR 14/154

**September 2014**

## Summary

**Site name:** Proposed Primary School, The Ridgeway School, Whitley, Reading, Berkshire

**Grid reference:** SU 7300 7042

**Site activity:** Archaeological Evaluation

**Date and duration of project:** 20th August 2014

**Project manager:** Steve Ford

**Site supervisor:** Steve Ford

**Site code:** RSR 14/154

**Summary of results:** Several of the evaluation trenches dug revealed a small number of deposits of later Bronze Age date. These are likely to represent occupation deposits, possibly with a 'burnt mound' also present. A few sherds of Roman pottery were also 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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[www.tvas.co.uk/reports/reports.asp](http://www.tvas.co.uk/reports/reports.asp).*

Report edited/checked by: Joanna Pine ✓ 12.09.14
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# **Proposed Primary School, The Ridgeway School, Whitley, Reading, Berkshire An Archaeological Evaluation**

by Steve Ford

**Report 14/154**

## **Introduction**

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at The Ridgeway School, Whitley, Reading, Berkshire (SU 7300 7042) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Gareth Talbot of Hampshire County Council on behalf of Reading Borough Council, Civic Centre, Reading, Berkshire RG1 7AE.

Planning consent is to be sought from Reading Borough Council to construct new facilities at the school. It is possible that the development area may contain archaeological deposits and in order to provide sufficient information on the archaeological potential of the site, so as to mitigate the effects of the development, a field evaluation has been requested.

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 Mr Roland Smith, Archaeology Officer at Berkshire Archaeology, advisors to the Borough on matters relating to archaeology. The fieldwork was undertaken by Steve Ford and Sophie Frampton on the 20th August 2014 with the site code RSR14/154. 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 within the grounds of the school to the west of the main school buildings (Fig. 2). The site is located off Willow Gardens with the eastern parts of the site occupied by housing and gardens. The west of the site is occupied by playing fields. Topographically the site lies on the a plateau forming the eastern margin of the valley of the river Kennet/ Foudry Brook. The site lies at a height of *c.* 79m above Ordnance Datum but slopes gently to the west. The underlying geology is mapped as plateau gravel (BGS 1946) and this was observed in the trenches.

## **Archaeological background**

The archaeological potential of the site stems from its location in an area where a modest range of prehistoric and Roman finds have been recorded in the Berkshire Historic Environment Record. In particular the unexplained monument known (in the archaeological literature) as Marshall's Hill which lies a distance to the north of the site, is possibly a Late Bronze Age ringfort (high status enclosure?) (Seaby 1932, 121-3; Bradley 1984). Field evaluation nearby located residual finds of Roman pottery, a medieval ditch and undated postholes (Ford and Pine 1998) and excavation at Northcourt Avenue (Milbank 2010) revealed an Early Roman occupation site. Iron Age pottery and Roman ditches were also recorded to the north (Carlsson 2010) and a Roman cremation burial to the north west but evaluation at Windermere Road to the north revealed nothing of interest (Ford 2010).

## **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. The specific aims of the project were;

- to determine of archaeologically relevant levels have survived on the site;
- to determine of archaeological deposits of any period are present; and
- to determine if any archaeologically significant deposits are present so as to inform the development of a mitigation strategy

It was proposed to dig 5 trenches at 10m long, all 1.60m wide to target the footprint of the new structures and car park. The trenches were to be excavated using a JCB-type machine equipped with a toothless grading bucket and supervised at all times by an archaeologist, with the spoil removed being monitored for finds. All potential archaeological deposits were to be hand-cleaned, and sufficient of the archaeological features and deposits exposed were to be excavated or sampled by hand to satisfy the aims of the project.

## **Results**

Six trenches were eventually dug in the locations as intended and ranged in length between 2.8-12.3m and between 0.38-10.55m in depth and all were 1.6m wide (Fig. 3). Trench 2 was subdivided to avoid a live power cable. 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, and Pls 1 and 2)

Trench 1 was aligned south-north and was 12.30m long and 0.48m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.1m of turf/topsoil, above 0.32m of brown clayey sand with gravel subsoil overlying fine gravel with sandy patches natural geology. A single pit (2) was recorded towards the southern end of the trench which was 1m across and 0.2m deep with a flat base and relatively steep sides. It was infilled with a dark brown clayey sand (52) with gravel with some rare burnt flint, very rare charcoal flecks 2 sherds of flint-gritted Later Bronze Age pottery and two flint flakes. A sieved soil sample produced a few fragments of charcoal only.

A search of the spoilheaps also recovered four sherds of Roman pottery.

#### Trenches 2A and 2B (Fig. 3, Pl. 3)

Trenches 2A and 2B were aligned east-west with a gap of 5m in between occupied by a power cable. Trench 2A was 5.5m long and Trench 2B 2.8m long. Both were 0.44m deep. The stratigraphy for both consisted of 0.1m of topsoil, above 0.3m of brown clayey sand with gravel subsoil overlying fine gravel with sandy patches natural geology. No archaeological features were observed but two sherds of Roman pottery were recovered from the spoilheap of Trench 2A.

#### Trench 3 (Figs 3 and 4, Pl. 4)

Trench 3 was aligned south-north and was 9.7m long and 0.55m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.1m of turf/topsoil, above 0.4m of grey/brown clayey sand with gravel subsoil overlying fine gravel with sandy patches natural geology. Much of the northern end of the trench was occupied by a spread of burnt flint within a very dark brown clayey sand. The spread extended beyond the baulks to the north, north east and north west. A sondage was dug on the southern edge of the spread which was 0.45m wide and 1.75m long. This revealed that at least two features were present.

The upper feature (1) contained much burnt flint which was visible at the surface of the trench. It comprised a feature whose base dipped gently to the north and was at least 0.4m deep. It is not known if this feature occupies the whole of the area of burnt flint spread, or is just one pit of several. The main fill (50) was dominated by burnt flint within a dark brown clayey sand. However, the section revealed a slightly lighter, less stony upper fill (53). Deposit (50) contained three sherds of flint-gritted Later Bronze Age pottery and a large fragment of a probable loomweight. A soil sample recovered commuted charcoal

The lower feature (3) had been truncated by cut 1. Pit 3 was steep sided with a flat base but its full extent was not recorded. It was filled with a dark brown clayey sand with some gravel and rare burnt flint. No finds were recovered. The lower part of the pit flooded.

A single flint flake was recovered from the spoilheap of this trench.

#### Trench 4 (Fig 3; Pl. 5)

Trench 4 was aligned south -north and was 12.30m long and 0.48m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.1m of turf/topsoil, above 0.32m of brown clayey sand with gravel subsoil overlying fine gravel/pea grit with sandy patches natural geology. There was a small lens of made ground at the northern end of the trench just beneath the topsoil. A test pit was dug at the northern end to a depth of 0.68m to confirm the correct interpretation of the geological sequence. Apart from an old ceramic pipe land drain on the north west margin of the trench no cut features were recorded and no artefacts recovered.

#### Trench 5 (Fig 3; Pl. 6)

Trench 5 was aligned east - west and was 9.0m long and 0.38m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.1m of turf/topsoil, above 0.33m of brown clayey sand with gravel subsoil overlying fine gravel with sandy patches natural geology. A clayey gravel stripe to the east was probably of peri-glacial origin. No cut features were recorded and no artefacts recovered.

## **Finds**

### *Pottery* by Steve Ford

Ten fragments of pottery were recovered.

#### Bronze Age

Six sherds of flint-gritted pottery were recovered, probably of later Bronze Age date. Three sherds (14g) came from pit 2 (52) representing two possibly three different vessels. One sherd, 9mm thick was fired a uniform orange through out with medium density of calcined flint up to 2mm across. The second sherd 6mm thick had dark red surfaces with a dark brown core and was tempered with a medium density of calcined flint up to 2mm across but with much more under 1mm along with some ironstone. The third sherd was very small and was dark brown and flint gritted. The other three sherds (18g) came from feature 1 (50). Two were 8mm thick and fired to a uniform orange through out. They were both tempered with a medium density of calcined flint up

to 3mm across. The third sherds was 6mm thick, dark brown with one red/brown surface and a low density of calcined flint up to 2mm across with some ochreous inclusions up to 2mm present.

### Roman

Four sherds (36g) of wheel turned fine sandy ware including a rim sherd representing three vessels were recovered from the spoilheap of trench 1. A sherd ( 22g)of grog-tempered storage jar and another small grog tempered sherd (1g) probably of Roman date was recovered from the spoilheap of trench 2A.

### *Loomweight* by Steve Ford

A single large fragment (200g) of fired clay was recovered from feature 1 (50) in trench 3. It is probably from a loomweight though no distinctive suspension holes were present.

### *Struck flint* by Steve Ford

Three struck flints were recovered during the fieldwork, all flakes. One flake was recovered from the spoilheaps of trench 3 and the other two from pit 2 (52). They are not in themselves closely datable but for those recovered from pit 2, are of Bronze Age date.

### *Charred plant remains* by Joanna Pine

Soil samples of 20L and 10L were taken from Pit 1 (50) and pit 2 (52) respectively These were wet sieved using a 0.25mm mesh. Both samples produced a moderate amount of charcoal, often commuted for pit 1, but some of the fragments were over 2mm and thus have potential for species identification. No other charred plant remains were present in these samples.

## **Conclusion**

The evaluation has showed that archaeologically relevant levels have survived on the site and prehistoric deposits are present probably representing later Bronze Age occupation. The dense spread of burnt flint in trench 3 probably represents a simple dump of pot boilers in a domestic setting but there is a possibility that it is a distinctive communal monument known as a 'burnt mound'. Several such sites are now recorded in the region (Dils and Yates 2013, 17) with a large Late Bronze Age one recorded at Green Park, on the valley floor to the



west of the site (Brossler et al. 2004, 21). Such sites are usually located close to water, and it is tempting to speculate that its presence at Ridgeway School, towards the edge of the plateau gravel is in part related to the presence of a spring line along the junction of the gravel with the impervious underlying clay deposits.

## References

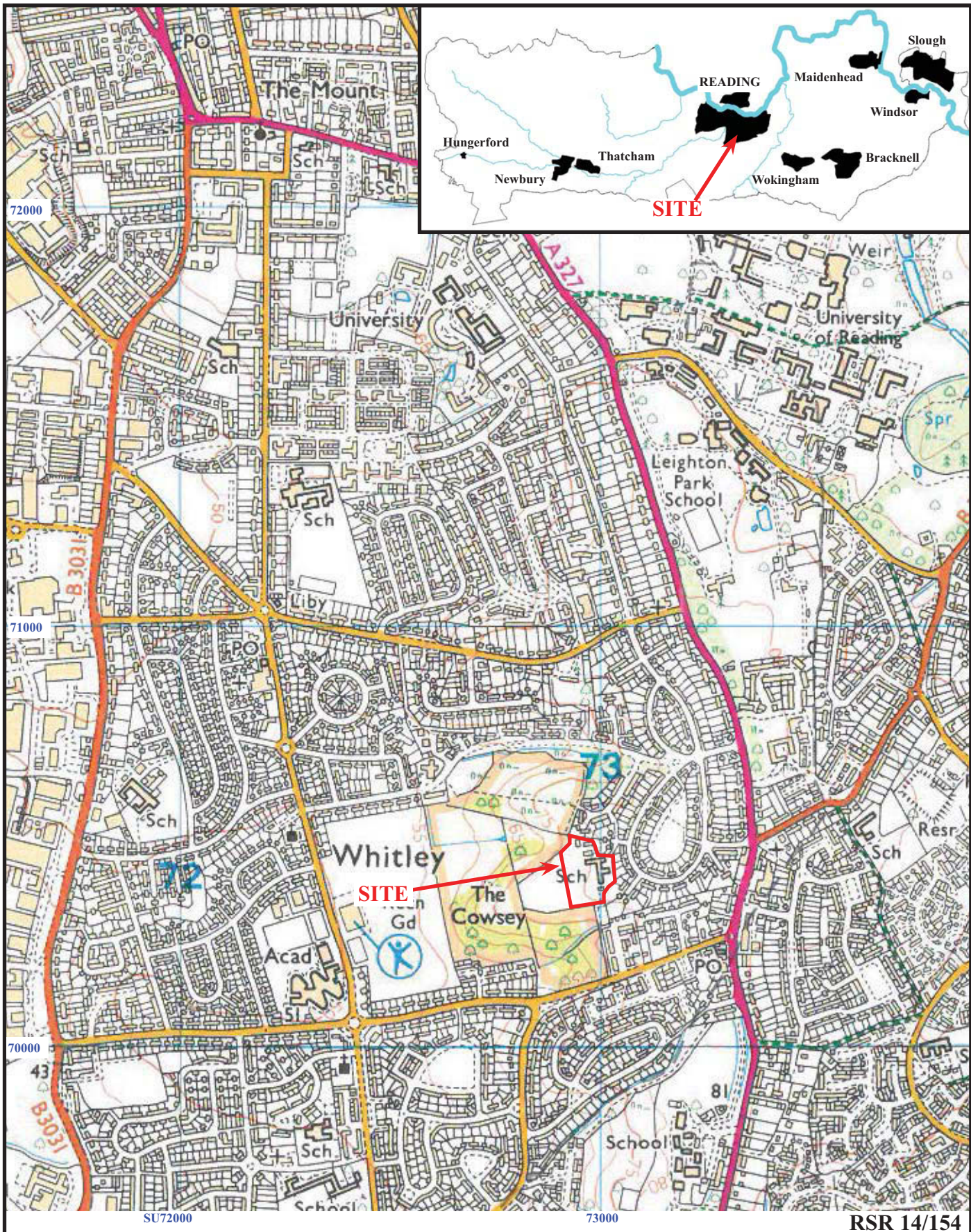
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**APPENDIX 1: Trench details**

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	12.3	1.6	0.48	0-0.1m Turf/topsoil; 0.1-0.42m brown clayey sand with gravel 0.42m+ fine gravel with sandy patches natural geology. Pit 2 <b>[PIs 1 and 2]</b>
2A	5.5	1.6	0.44	0-0.1m Turf/topsoil; 0.1-0.4m brown clayey sand with gravel 0.4m+ fine gravel with sandy patches natural geology. <b>[PI. 3]</b>
2B	2.8	1.6	0.44	0-0.1m Turf/topsoil; 0.1-0.4m brown clayey sand with gravel 0.4m+ fine gravel with sandy patches natural geology.
3	11.3	1.6	0.42	0-0.1m Turf/topsoil; 0.1-0.4m brown clayey sand with gravel 0.4m+ fine gravel with sandy patches natural geology. Pits 1 and 3; burnt flint spread <b>[PI. 4]</b>
4	9.7	1.6	0.55	0-0.1m Turf/topsoil; 0.1-0.5m brown clayey sand with gravel and made ground at north end; 0.5m+ fine gravel with sandy patches natural geology. Test pit at 9m yo 0.68m. Land drain down west side . <b>[PI. 5]</b>
5	9	1.6	0.38	0-0.1m Turf/topsoil; 0.1-0.38m brown clayey sand with gravel 0.38m+ fine gravel with sandy patches and clay stripe, natural geology <b>[PI. 6]</b>

**APPENDIX 1: Feature details**

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill</i>	<i>Trench</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	50, 53	3	Pit	Cuts 3. Bronze Age pottery
2	52	1	Pit	Bronze Age pottery
3	51	3	Pit	Cut by 1. Bronze Age pottery

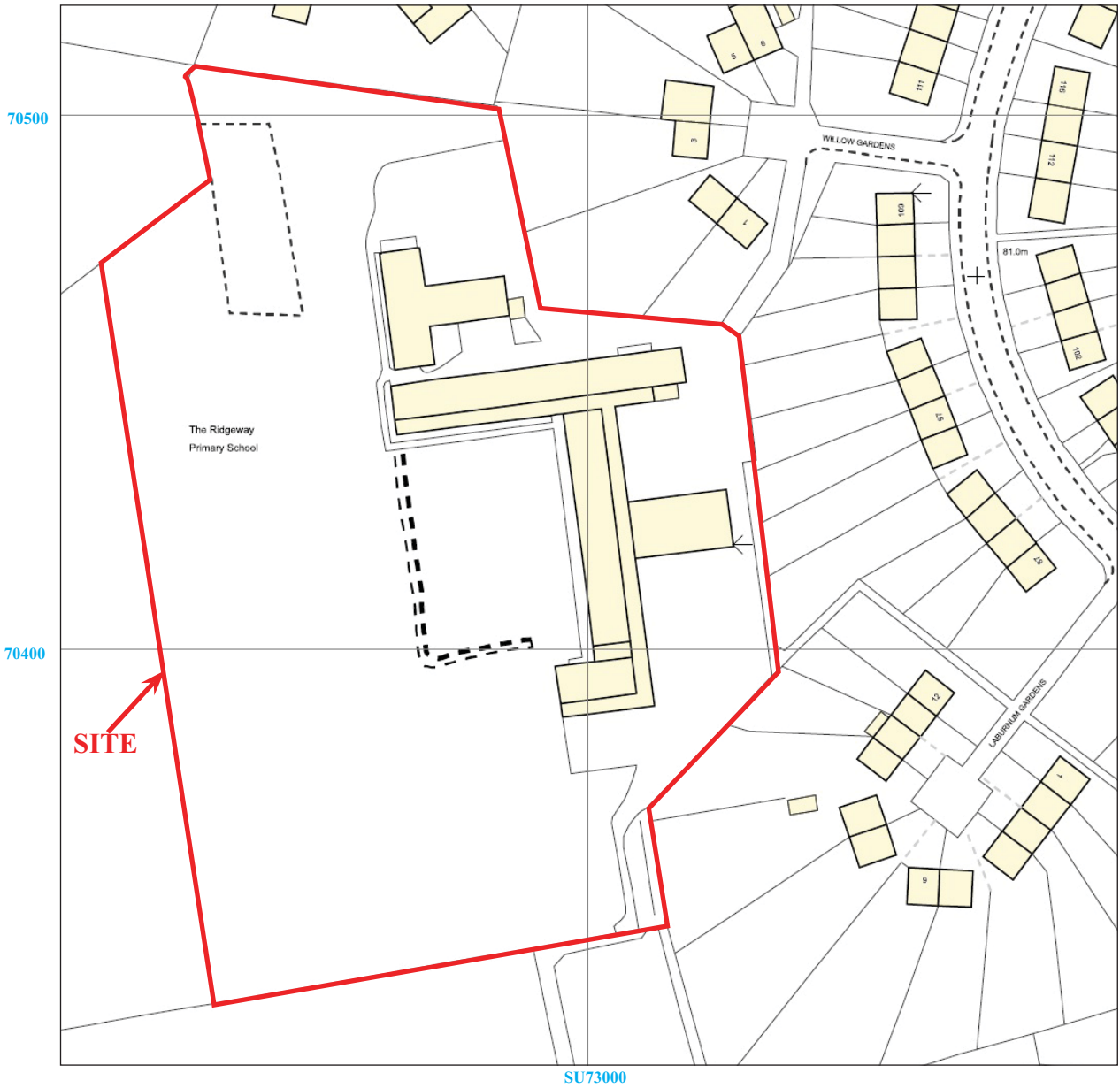


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Figure 1. Location of site within Reading and Berkshire.

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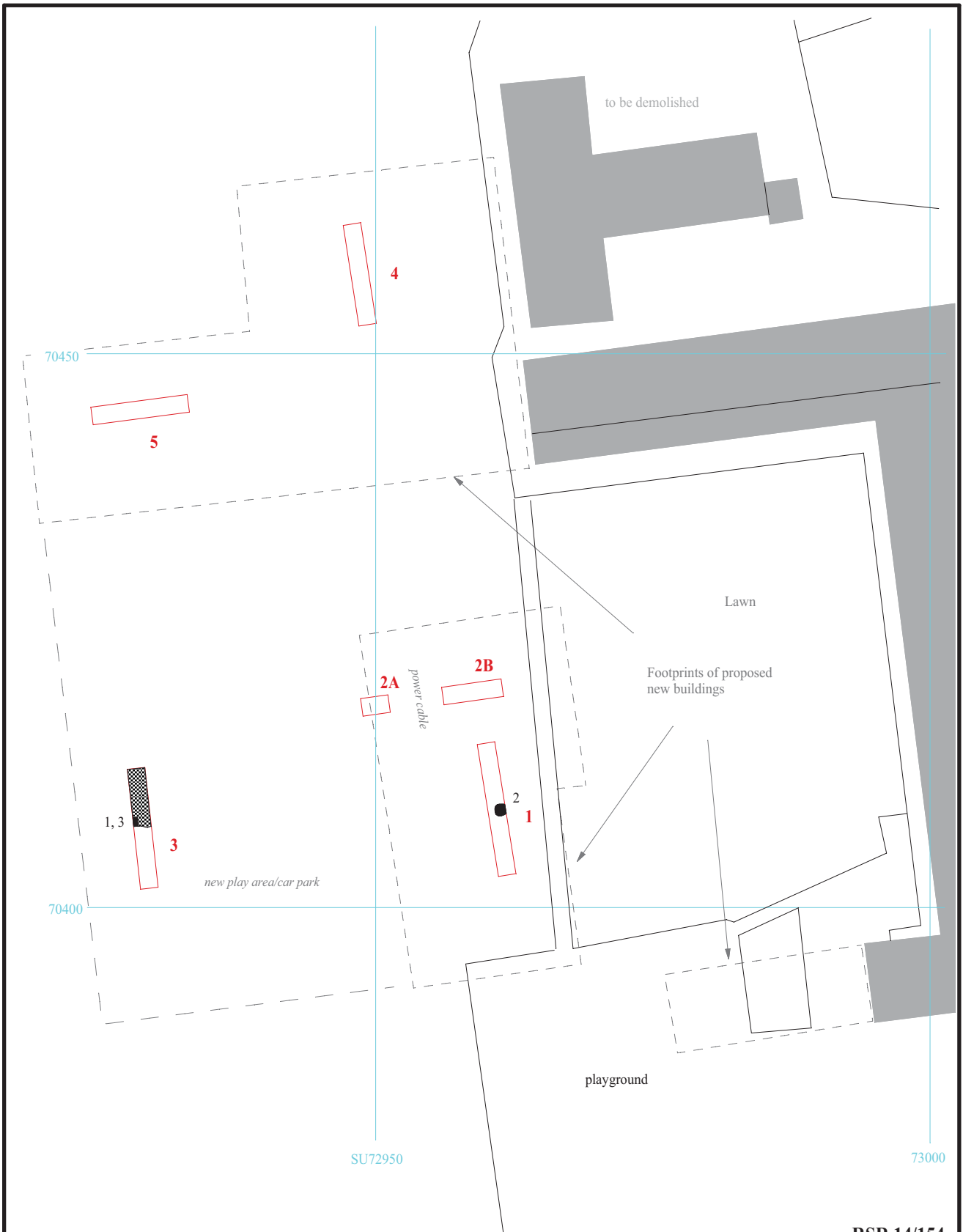
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Figure 2. Detailed location of site.

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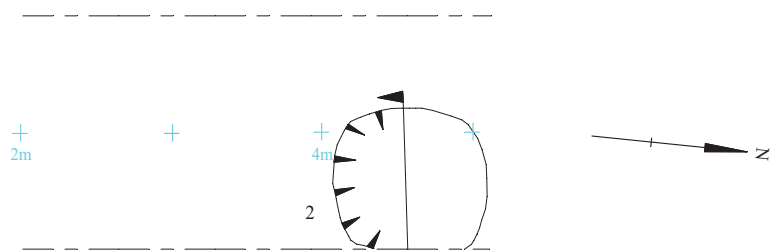
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Figure 3. Location of trenches.

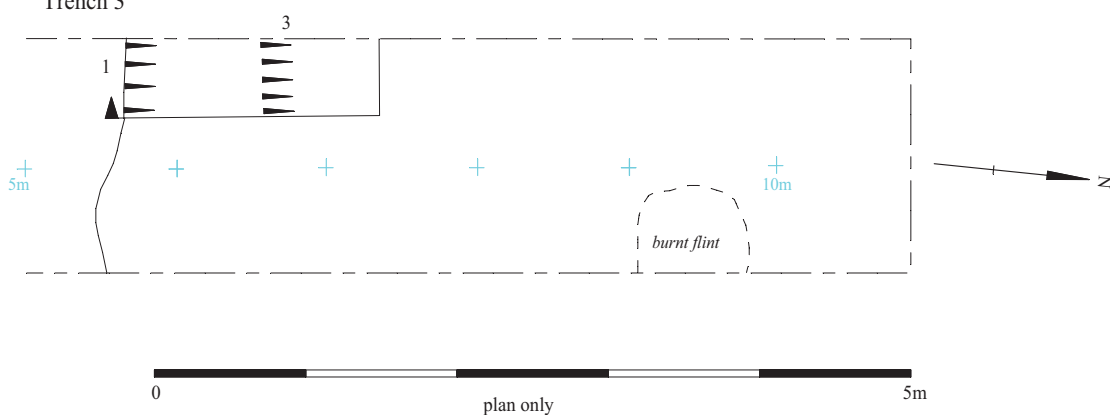


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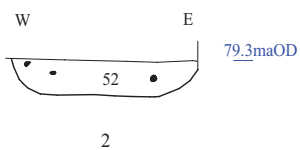
Trench 1



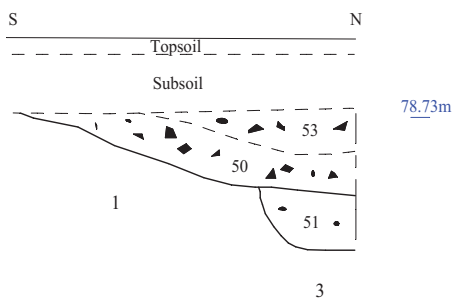
Trench 3



Trench 1



Trench 3



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Figure 4. Detail of trenches.



Plate 1. Trench 1, looking north, Scales: horizontal 2m and 1m, vertical 0.5m.



Plate 2. Trench 1, Pit 2 looking north, Scales: 1m and 0.1m.

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Plates 1 - 2.

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Plate 3. Trench 2B looking west, Scales: 2m. 1m and 0.5m.



Plate 4. Trench 3, Pits 1 and 3, looking west, Scales: 2m and 0.5m.

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Plates 3 - 4.**

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Plate 5. Trench 4, looking north, Scales: 2m, 1m and 0.5m.



Plate 6. Trench 5 looking west, Scales: 2m, 1m and 0.5m.

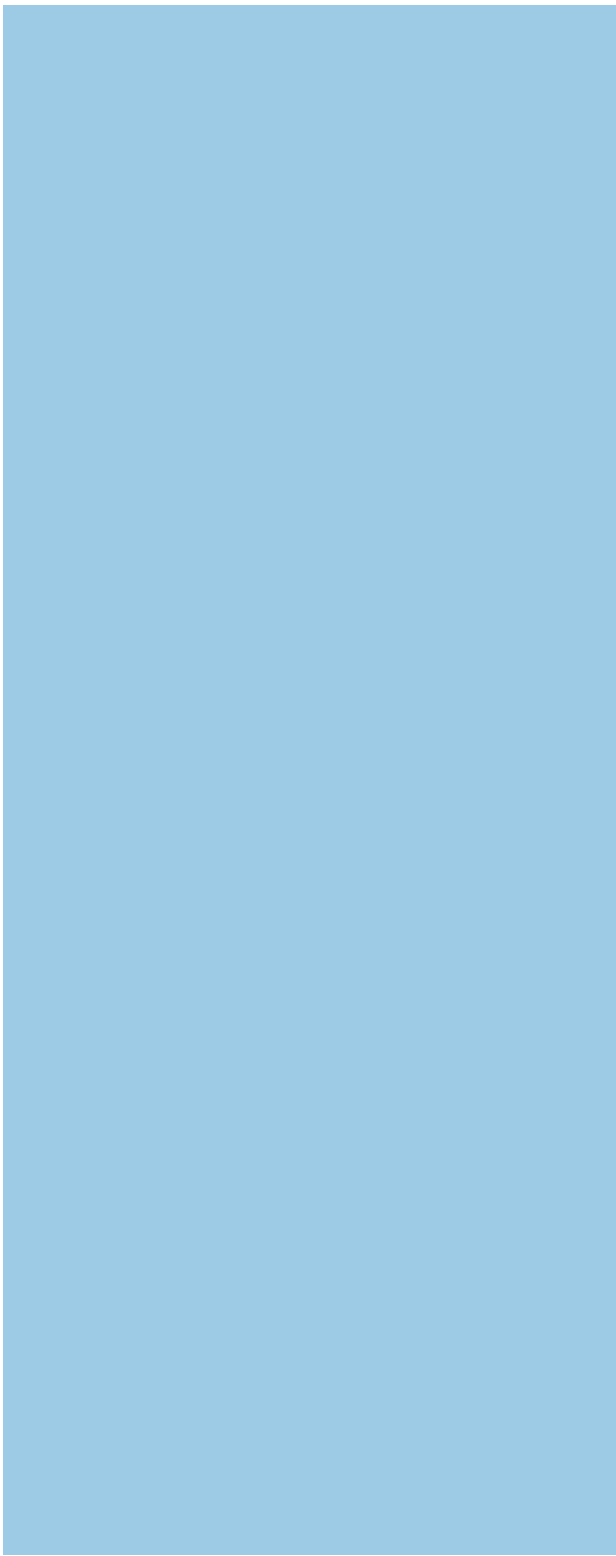
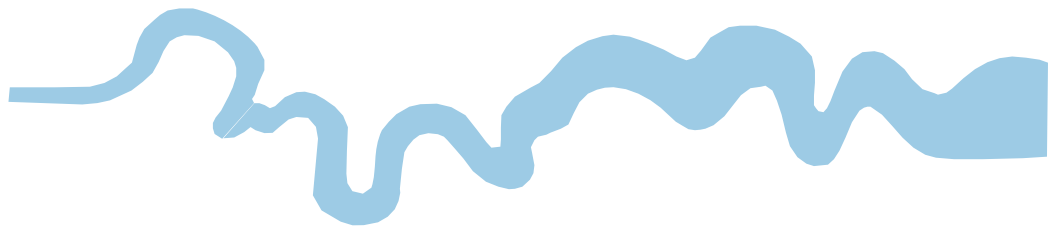
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Plates 5 - 6.**

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## TIME CHART

	<b>Calendar Years</b>
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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