

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 Watching Brief

by Susan Porter

Site Code: AHR13/214

(SU 7167 7368)

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

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For The Sisk Group

by Susan Porter

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code AHR 13/214

October 2014

Summary

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

Grid reference: SU 7167 7368

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 8th September - 15th October 2014

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Susan Porter

Site code: AHR 13/214

Summary of results: No deposits of archaeological interest were observed in the small area of the site that had not been previously truncated by a deep basement carpark.

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.

*This report may be copied for bona fide research or planning purposes without the explicit permission of the copyright holder. All TVAS unpublished fieldwork reports are available on our website:
www.tvas.co.uk/reports/reports.asp.*

Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford✓ 20.10.14 Steve Preston✓ 20.10.14

Aldwych House, Blagrove Street, Reading An Archaeological Watching Brief

by Susan Porter

Report 13/214b

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at Blagrove Street, Reading, Berkshire (SU 7167 7368 (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Chris Clarke of CgMs Consulting, 140 London Wall, London, EC2Y 5DN on behalf of the Sisk Group.

Planning permission (app no: 10/00989/FUL) has been granted by Reading Borough Council to redevelop the property of Aldwych House. As this development has the potential to affect any archaeological remains which may be present on the site, and because of the site's archaeological potential (in particular its proximity to Reading Abbey), the permission was subject to a condition (20) requiring a programme of archaeological works. Test pitting evaluation revealed no features or finds of archaeological interest on the site (Porter 2013) but an archaeological watching brief had been deemed appropriate to fulfil the 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 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 David Platt during September and October 2014. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Reading Museum in due course and the site code is AHR 13/214.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located in the centre of Reading, on the ridge of land between the River Thames to the north and the River Kennet to the south. It lies 750m west of the confluence of the Rivers Thames and Kennet (Fig. 1) Prior to demolition the building fronted onto Forbury Road to the north, Blagrove Street to the west and initially had access from the south from Vine Street (Fig. 2). The site lies on a slope from 43.9m aOD in the south west, down to 42.7m in the north and c.41m in the east. The underlying geology is recorded as gravel above upper chalk (BGS 1946), though a thin brickearth cap to the gravel has been recorded elsewhere in the town centre.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site has been highlighted in a desk based assessment for the project (Darton 2008). In summary the 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, to the rear of 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 debris was also attested. Roman coins were found *c.* 200m south of Aldwych House during works on Broad Street and groundworks 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. Work in advance of construction of the Forbury Road roundabout to the north-east recorded a length of the Abbey's Plummery Wall and groundwork in Forbury Gardens revealed remains of the Abbey's medieval cemetery, believed to have continued in use after the Dissolution until 1556.

Three small test pits were excavated on the site in November 2013 (Porter 2013), in the area of a basement access ramp on the eastern side of the site. It was in this area where archaeological deposits were expected to survive, however, although the test pits located areas of surviving natural geology, no deposits of archaeological interest were encountered.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to record and excavate any features encountered during the course of ground reduction, and determine the character, quality and date of each feature or group of features.

Specific research aims were:

- to determine the presence of any activity on the site pre-dating the medieval period;
- to establish the presence or otherwise of Medieval activity at the site, and determine whether this evidence can be associated with Reading Abbey; and
- to establish the likely impact of past land use and development.

The overlying ground was removed using a 360° type tracked machine initially equipped with a toothed bucket in order to remove concrete and other solid made ground debris, this was replaced with a ditching bucket as soon as possible to preserve the integrity of any archaeological horizons. Overburden was removed in spits (where

possible) until the archaeological horizon was reached. Where deposits of archaeological interest were encountered they were to be hand cleaned and recorded in both section and plan. The depth and nature of all colluvial and masking deposits (should they be encountered) was to be established across the site. If remains were encountered that would warrant preservation *in-situ*, an appropriate mitigation strategy was to be developed.

Results (Fig. 3, Pls. 1–2)

Following removal of the overlying concrete to the level of the modern brick surface encountered in test pit 1, the area of excavation within the vicinity of test pits 1 and 2 was excavated to a total depth of 1.60m before chalk natural geology was encountered, with the exception of a small patch of natural geology surviving at a depth of 0.80m encountered within test pit 2 (Porter 2013). This small area was once again encountered during this phase of works and was observed to be *c.* 1m in length and *c.* 1.20m wide, (essentially the size of test pit 2), heavily truncated on all sides by modern building activity to a depth of 1.60m (Pl. 1). With the exception of this small high area of natural geology the stratigraphy encountered was identical to that seen in test pit 1, comprising 0.10m modern brick overlying 0.20m loose brown orange sandy gravel made ground which in turn overlay 1.10m loose black grey gravel sand made ground with frequent brick and tile inclusions and occasional chalky flecks. At a depth of 1.60m (40.20m AOD) brown/ orange gravel natural geology was observed at the northern extent, becoming chalk *c.* 0.50m from the northern end of the excavation (Pl. 2).

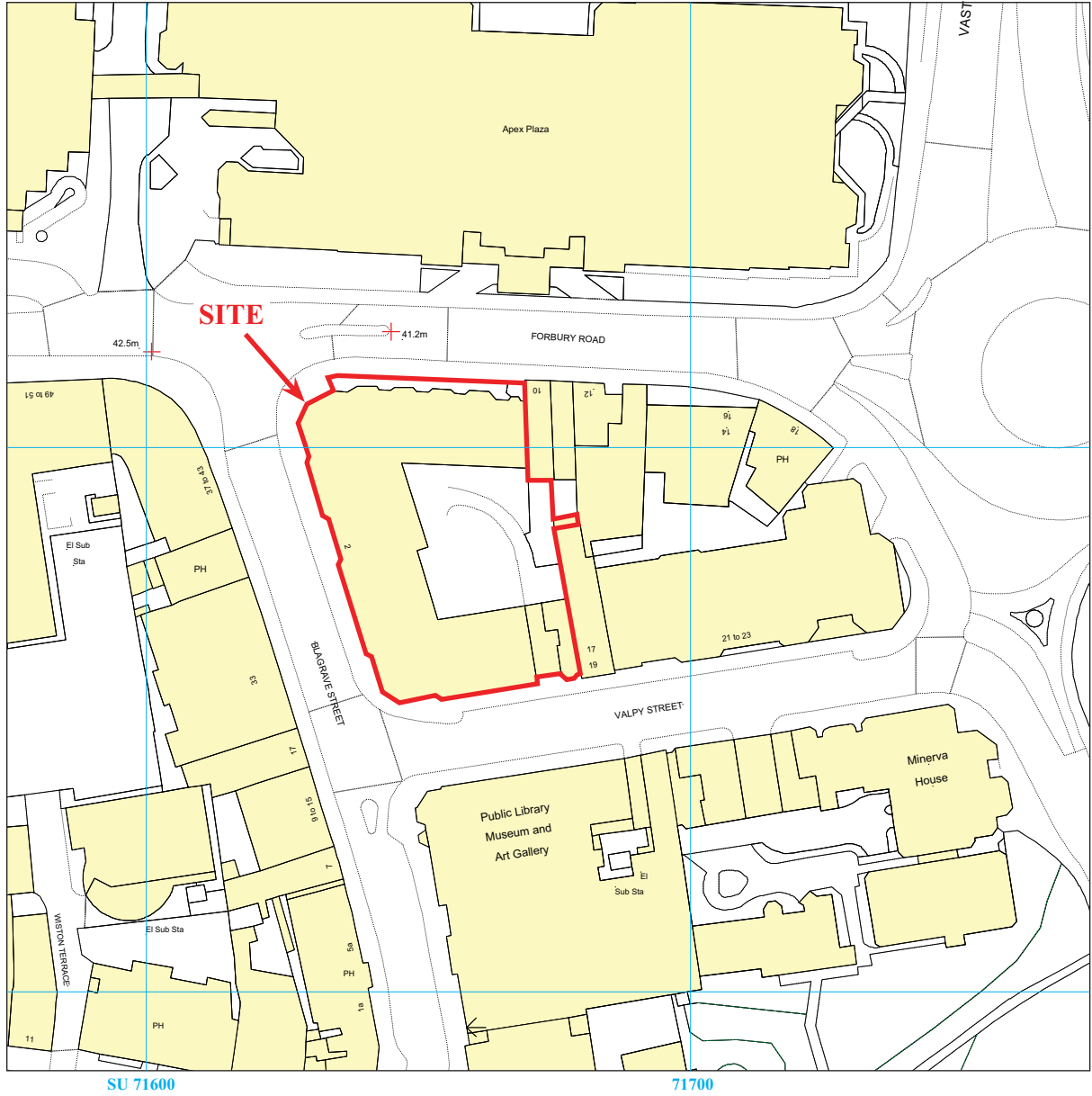
Although natural geology was encountered it appears heavily truncated by made ground, and no deposits of archaeological interest were observed.

Conclusion

The previous development include a large deep basement which truncated most of the archaeologically relevant horizons on the site. This watching brief examined a small area of the site, which had not been obviously truncated but no deposits or artefacts of interest were recorded.

References

- BGS, 1946, *British Geological Survey*, 1:63,360, Sheet 268, Drift Edition, Keyworth
- Clarke, C, 2013, 'Aldwych House, Blagrove Street, Reading, Berkshire; written scheme of investigation for an archaeological watching brief', CgMs ref DH/16133, London
- Darton, L, 2008, 'Aldwych House, Blagrove Street, Reading, Berkshire; an archaeological desk-based assessment', CgMs, London
- NPPF 2012, *National Planning Policy Framework*, Dept Communities and Local Govt, London
- Pine, J, 2005, 'A Medieval Building and post-medieval Foundry Site at 1 Friar Street', in S Preston (ed), *Reading and Windsor, Old and New*, Thames Valley Archaeological Services Monogr 7, Reading, 45-59
- Porter, S, 2013, 'Aldwych House, Blagrove Street, Reading, Berkshire; an archaeological evaluation', Thames Valley Archaeological Services unpubl rep **13/214**, Reading



AHR 13/214

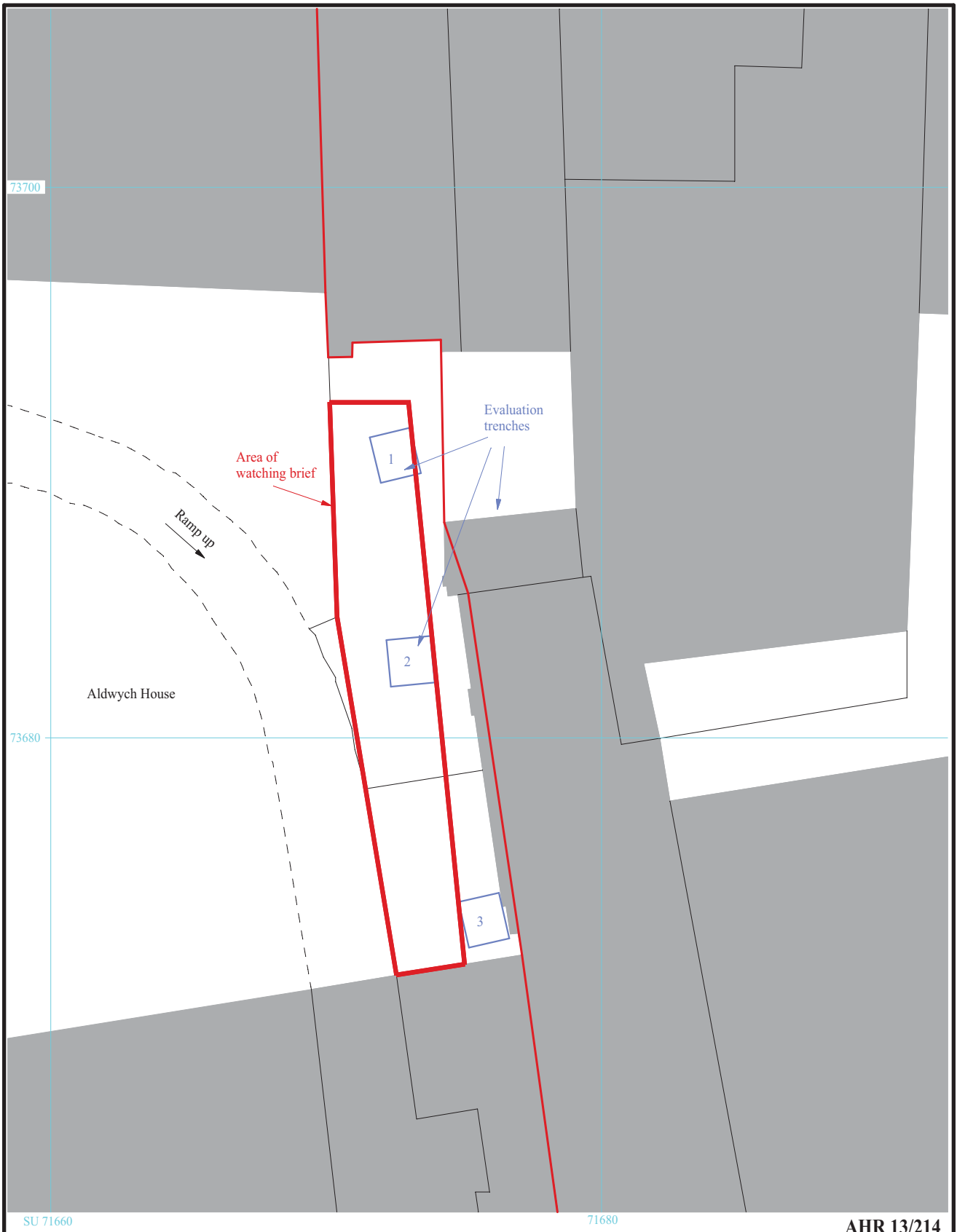
**Aldwych House, Blagrove Street,
Reading, Berkshire, 2014
Archaeological Watching Brief**

Figure 2. Detailed location of site off Blagrove Street.

Reproduced from Ordnance Survey Digital Mapping under licence.
Crown copyright reserved. Scale 1:1250

THAMES VALLEY
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SERVICES





AHR 13/214



**Aldwych House, Blagrove Street,
Reading, Berkshire, 2014
Archaeological Watching Brief**

Figure 3. Watching brief location showing previous evaluation trenches.



THAMES VALLEY
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SERVICES



Plate 1. Higher area of natural chalk, looking northeast, scales: 1m and 0.5m.



Plate 2. Reduced area, looking south.

AHR 13/214

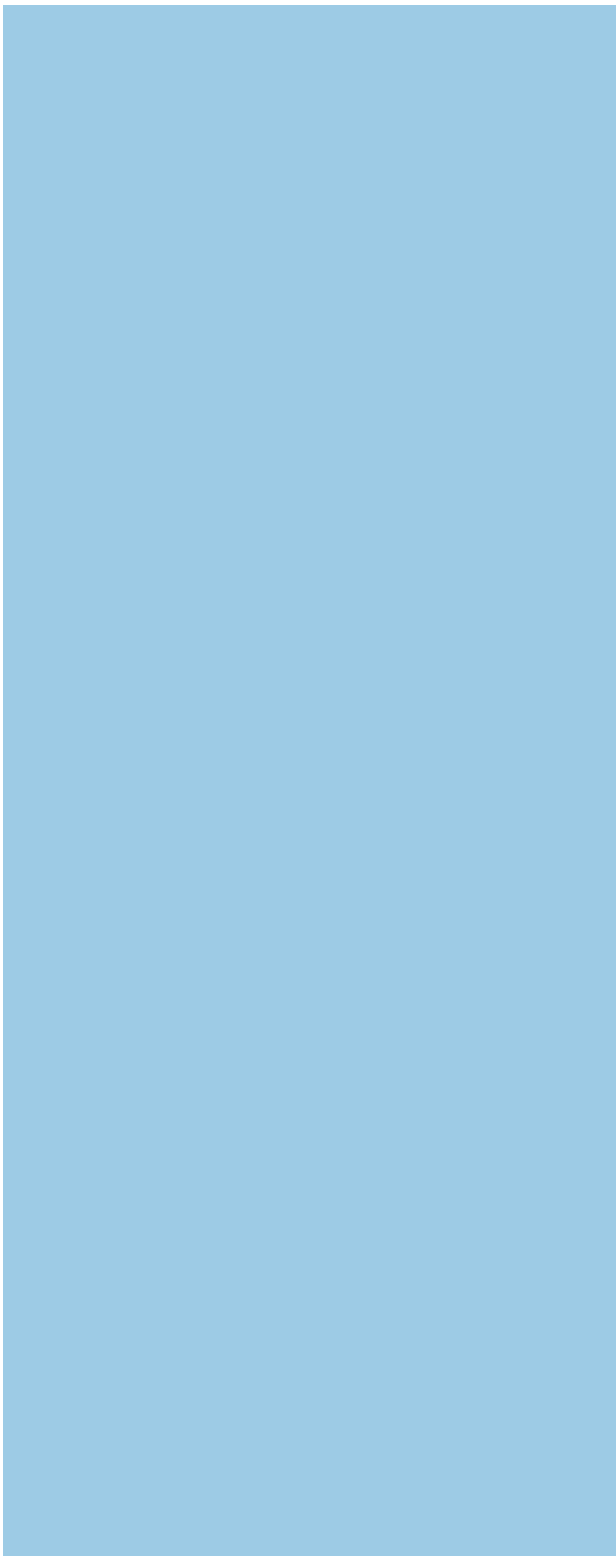
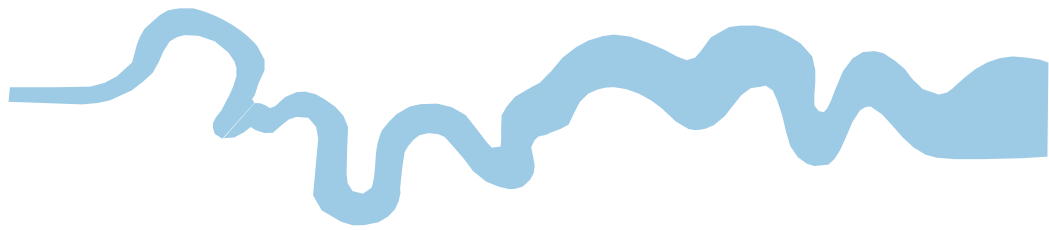
**Aldwych House, Blagrove Street,
Reading, Berkshire, 2014
Archaeological Watching Brief
Plates 1 - 2.**

THAMES VALLEY
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SERVICES

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**